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MARJORIE DAW

T. B. ALDRICH

EDINBURGH · DAVID · DOUGLAS · PUBLISHER ·

BY

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

AUTHOR OF 'THE QUEEN OF SHEBA,' 'PRUDENCE PALFREY,' 'THE STILLWATER TRAGEDY,' ETC.

Author's Edition

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EDINBURGH

DAVID DOUGLAS, CASTLE STREET

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MARJORIE DAW.

I.

DR. DILLON TO EDWARD DELANEY, ESQ., AT THE PINES, NEAR RYE, N. H.

August 8, 1872.

MY DEAR SIR,—I am happy to assure you that your anxiety is without reason. Flemming will be confined to the sofa for three or four weeks, and will have to be careful at first how he uses his leg. A fracture of this kind is always a tedious affair. Fortunately the bone was very skilfully set by the surgeon who chanced to be in the drug-store where Flemming was brought after his fall, and I apprehend no permanent inconvenience from the accident. *Flemming is doing perfectly well physically;* but I must confess that the irritable and morbid state of mind into which he has fallen causes me a great deal of uneasiness. He is the last man in the world who ought to break his leg. You know how impetuous our friend

is ordinarily, what a soul of restlessness and energy, never content unless he is rushing at some object, like a sportive bull at a red shawl; but amiable withal. He is no longer amiable. His temper has become something frightful. Miss Fanny Flemming came up from Newport, where the family are staying for the summer, to nurse him, but he packed her off the next morning in tears. He has a complete set of Balzac's works, twenty-seven volumes, piled up near his sofa, to throw at Watkins whenever that exemplary serving-man appears with his meals. Yesterday I very innocently brought Flemming a small basket of lemons. You know it was a strip of lemon-peel on the curb-stone that caused our friend's mischance. Well, he no sooner set his eyes upon those lemons than he fell into such a rage as I cannot adequately describe. This is only one of his moods, and the least distressing. At other times he sits with bowed head regarding his splintered limb, silent, sullen, despairing. When this fit is on him —and it sometimes lasts all day—nothing can distract his melancholy. He refuses to eat, does not even read the newspapers; books, except as projectiles for Watkins,

have no charms for him. His state is truly pitiable.

Now, if he were a poor man, with a family depending on his daily labour, this irritability and despondency would be natural enough. But in a young fellow of twenty-four, with plenty of money and seemingly not a care in the world, the thing is monstrous. If he continues to give way to his vagaries in this manner, he will end by bringing on an inflammation of the fibula. It was the fibula he broke. I am at my wits' end to know what to prescribe for him. I have anæsthetics and lotions, to make people sleep and to soothe pain; but I 've no medicine that will make a man have a little common-sense. That is beyond my skill, but may be it is not beyond yours. You are Flemming's intimate friend, his *fidus Achates*. Write to him, write to him frequently, distract his mind, cheer him up, and prevent him from becoming a confirmed case of melancholia. Perhaps he has some important plans disarranged by his present confinement. If he has you will know, and will know how to advise him judiciously. I trust your father finds the change beneficial? I am, my dear sir, with great respect, etc.

II.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING, WEST 38TH STREET, NEW YORK.

August 9, 1872.

MY DEAR JACK,—I had a line from Dillon this morning, and was rejoiced to learn that your hurt is not so bad as reported. Like a certain personage, you are not so black and blue as you are painted. Dillon will put you on your pins again in two or three weeks, if you will only have patience and follow his counsels. Did you get my note of last Wednesday? I was greatly troubled when I heard of the accident.

I can imagine how tranquil and saintly you are with your leg in a trough! It is deuced awkward, to be sure, just as we had promised ourselves a glorious month together at the seaside; but we must make the best of it. It is unfortunate, too, that

my father's health renders it impossible for me to leave him. I think he has much improved; the sea air is his native element; but he still needs my arm to lean upon in his walks, and requires some one more careful than a servant to look after him. I cannot come to you, dear Jack, but I have hours of unemployed time on hand, and I will write you a whole post-office full of letters, if that will divert you. Heaven knows, I haven't anything to write about. It isn't as if we were living at one of the beach houses; then I could do you some character studies, and fill your imagination with groups of sea-goddesses, with their (or somebody else's) raven and blonde manes hanging down their shoulders. You should have Aphrodite in morning wrapper, in evening costume, and in her prettiest bathing suit. But we are far from all that here. We have rooms in a farm-house, on a cross-road, two miles from the hotels, and lead the quietest of lives.

I wish I were a novelist. This old house, with its sanded floors and high wainscots, and its narrow windows looking out upon a cluster of pines that turn themselves into Æolian harps every time the wind blows,

would be the place in which to write a summer romance. It should be a story with the odours of the forest and the breath of the sea in it. It should be a novel like one of that Russian fellow's—what 's his name? —Tourguénieff, Turguenef, Turgenif, Toorguniff, Turgénjew—nobody knows how to spell him. Yet I wonder if even a Liza or an Alexandra Paulovna could stir the heart of a man who has constant twinges in his leg. I wonder if one of our own Yankee girls of the best type, haughty and *spirituelle*, would be of any comfort to you in your present deplorable condition. If I thought so, I would hasten down to the Surf House and catch one for you; or, better still, I would find you one over the way.

Picture to yourself a large white house just across the road, nearly opposite our cottage. It is not a house, but a mansion, built, perhaps, in the colonial period, with rambling extensions, and gambrel roof, and a wide piazza on three sides—a self-possessed, high-bred piece of architecture, with its nose in the air. It stands back from the road, and has an obsequious retinue of fringed elms and oaks and weeping willows.

Sometimes in the morning, and oftener in the afternoon, when the sun has withdrawn from that part of the mansion, a young woman appears on the piazza with some mysterious Penelope web of embroidery in her hand, or a book. There is a hammock over there—of pineapple fibre it looks from here. A hammock is very becoming when one is eighteen, and has golden hair, and dark eyes, and an emerald-coloured illusion dress looped up after the fashion of a Dresden china shepherdess, and is *chaussée* like a belle of the time of Louis Quatorze. All this splendour goes into that hammock, and sways there like a pond-lily in the golden afternoon. The window of my bedroom looks down on that piazza—and so do I.

But enough of this nonsense, which ill becomes a sedate young attorney taking his vacation with an invalid father. Drop me a line, dear Jack, and tell me how you really are. State your case. Write me a long, quiet letter. If you are violent or abusive, I 'll take the law to you.

III.

JOHN FLEMMING TO EDWARD DELANEY.

August 11, 1872.

YOUR letter, dear Ned, was a godsend. Fancy what a fix I am in—I, who never had a day's sickness since I was born. My left leg weighs three tons. It is embalmed in spices and smothered in layers of fine linen like a mummy. I can't move. I haven't moved for five thousand years. I 'm of the time of Pharaoh.

I lie from morning till night on a lounge, staring into the hot street. Everybody is out of town enjoying himself. The brown-stone-front houses across the street resemble a row of particularly ugly coffins set up on end. A green mould is settling on the names of the deceased, carved on the silver door-plates. Sardonic spiders have sewed up the keyholes. All is silence and dust and desolation. I interrupt this a moment,

to take a shy at Watkins with the second volume of *César Birotteau*. Missed him! I think I could bring him down with a copy of Sainte-Beuve or the *Dictionnaire Universel*, if I had it. These small Balzac books somehow do not quite fit my hand; but I shall fetch him yet. I've an idea that Watkins is tapping the old gentleman's Château Yquem. Duplicate key of the wine-cellar. Hibernian swarries in the front basement. Young Cheops upstairs, snug in his cerements. Watkins glides into my chamber, with that colourless, hypocritical face of his drawn out long like an accordion; but I know he grins all the way downstairs, and is glad I have broken my leg. Was not my evil star in the very zenith when I ran up to town to attend that dinner at Delmonico's? I didn't come up altogether for that. It was partly to buy Frank Livingstone's roan mare Margot. And now I shall not be able to sit in the saddle these two months. I'll send the mare down to you at The Pines—is that the name of the place?

Old Dillon fancies that I have something on my mind. He drives me wild with lemons. Lemons for a mind diseased!

Nonsense. I am only as restless as the devil under this confinement—a thing I 'm not used to. Take a man who has never had so much as a headache or a toothache in his life, strap one of his legs in a section of water-spout, keep him in a room in the city for weeks, with the hot weather turned on, and then expect him to smile and purr and be happy ! It is preposterous. I can't be cheerful or calm.

Your letter is the first consoling thing I have had since my disaster, ten days ago. It really cheered me up for half an hour. Send me a screed, Ned, as often as you can, if you love me. Anything will do. Write me more about that little girl in the hammock. That was very pretty, all that about the Dresden china shepherdess and the pond-lily ; the imagery a little mixed, perhaps, but very pretty. I didn't suppose you had so much sentimental furniture in your upper story. It shows how one may be familiar for years with the reception-room of his neighbour, and never suspect what is directly under his mansard. I supposed your loft stuffed with dry legal parchments, mortgages, and affidavits ; you take down a package of manuscript, and

lo! there are lyrics and sonnets and canzonettas. You really have a graphic descriptive touch, Edward Delaney, and I suspect you of anonymous love-tales in the magazines.

I shall be a bear until I hear from you again. Tell me all about your pretty *inconnue* across the road. What is her name? Who is she? Who 's her father? Where 's her mother? Who 's her lover? You cannot imagine how this will occupy me. The more trifling the better. My imprisonment has weakened me intellectually to such a degree that I find your epistolary gifts quite considerable. I am passing into my second childhood. In a week or two I shall take to India-rubber rings and prongs of coral. A silver cup, with an appropriate inscription, would be a delicate attention on your part. In the meantime, write!

IV.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING.

August 12, 1872.

THE sick pasha shall be amused. *Bismillah!* he wills it so. If the story-teller becomes prolix and tedious—the bow-string and the sack, and two Nubians to drop him into the Piscataqua! But truly, Jack, I have a hard task. There is literally nothing here—except the little girl over the way. She is swinging in the hammock at this moment. It is to me compensation for many of the ills of life to see her now and then put out a small kid boot, which fits like a glove, and set herself going. Who is she, and what is her name? Her name is Daw. Only daughter of Mr. Richard W. Daw, ex-colonel and banker. Mother dead. One brother at Harvard, elder brother killed at the battle of Fair Oaks, ten years ago. Old, rich family, the Daws. This is the

homestead, where father and daughter pass eight months of the twelve; the rest of the year in Baltimore and Washington. The New England winter too many for the old gentleman. The daughter is called Marjorie —Marjorie Daw. Sounds odd at first, doesn't it? But after you say it over to yourself half a dozen times you like it. There 's a pleasing quaintness to it, something prim and violet-like. Must be a nice sort of girl to be called Marjorie Daw.

I had mine host of The Pines in the witness-box last night, and drew the foregoing testimony from him. He has charge of Mr. Daw's vegetable-garden, and has known the family these thirty years. Of course I shall make the acquaintance of my neighbours before many days. It will be next to impossible for me not to meet Mr. Daw or Miss Daw in some of my walks. The young lady has a favourite path to the sea-beach. I shall intercept her some morning, and touch my hat to her. Then the princess will bend her fair head to me with courteous surprise not unmixed with haughtiness. Will snub me, in fact. All this for thy sake, O Pasha of the Snapt Axle-tree! . . . How oddly things fall out! Ten

minutes ago I was called down to the parlour—you know the kind of parlours in farmhouses on the coast, a sort of amphibious parlour, with sea-shells on the mantel-piece and spruce branches in the chimney-place—where I found my father and Mr. Daw doing the antique polite to each other. He had come to pay his respects to his new neighbours. Mr. Daw is a tall, slim gentleman of about fifty-five, with a florid face and snow-white moustache and side-whiskers. Looks like Mr. Dombey, or as Mr. Dombey would have looked if he had served a few years in the British army. Mr. Daw was a colonel in the late war, commanding the regiment in which his son was a lieutenant. Plucky old boy, backbone of New Hampshire granite. Before taking his leave the colonel delivered himself of an invitation as if he were issuing a general order. Miss Daw has a few friends coming, at 4 P.M., to play croquet on the lawn (parade-ground) and have tea (cold rations) on the piazza. Will we honour them with our company? (or be sent to the guard-house.) My father declines on the plea of ill-health. My father's son bows with as much suavity as he knows, and accepts.

In my next I shall have something to tell you. I shall have seen the little beauty face to face. I have a presentiment, Jack, that this Daw is a *rara avis!* Keep up your spirits, my boy, until I write you another letter; and send me along word how 's your leg.

V.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING.

August 13, 1872.

THE party, my dear Jack, was as dreary as possible. A lieutenant of the navy, the rector of the Episcopal Church at Stillwater, and a society swell from Nahant. The lieutenant looked as if he had swallowed a couple of his buttons, and found the bullion rather indigestible; the rector was a pensive youth, of the daffydowndilly sort; and the swell from Nahant was a very weak tidal wave indeed. The women were much better, as they always are; the two Miss Kingsburys of Philadelphia, staying at the Seashell House, two bright and engaging girls. But Marjorie Daw!

The company broke up soon after tea, and I remained to smoke a cigar with the colonel on the piazza. It was like seeing a picture, to see Miss Marjorie hovering

around the old soldier, and doing a hundred gracious little things for him. She brought the cigars and lighted the tapers with her own delicate fingers, in the most enchanting fashion. As we sat there, she came and went in the summer twilight, and seemed, with her white dress and pale gold hair, like some lovely phantom that had sprung into existence out of the smoke-wreaths. If she had melted into air, like the statue of Galatea in the play, I should have been more sorry than surprised.

It was easy to perceive that the old colonel worshipped her, and she him. I think the relation between an elderly father and a daughter just blooming into womanhood the most beautiful possible. There is in it a subtle sentiment that cannot exist in the case of mother and daughter, or that of son and mother. But this is getting into deep water.

I sat with the Daws until half-past ten, and saw the moon rise on the sea. The ocean, that had stretched motionless and black against the horizon, was changed by magic into a broken field of glittering ice, interspersed with marvellous silvery fjords. In the far distance the Isles of Shoals loomed up like a group of huge bergs drifting down

on us. The Polar Regions in a June thaw! It was exceedingly fine. What did we talk about? We talked about the weather—and *you!* The weather has been disagreeable for several days past—and so have you. I glided from one topic to the other very naturally. I told my friends of your accident; how it had frustrated all our summer plans, and what our plans were. I played quite a spirited solo on the fibula. Then I described you; or, rather, I didn't. I spoke of your amiability, of your patience under this severe affliction; of your touching gratitude when Dillon brings you little presents of fruit; of your tenderness to your sister Fanny, whom you would not allow to stay in town to nurse you, and how you heroically sent her back to Newport, preferring to remain alone with Mary, the cook, and your man Watkins, to whom, by the way, you were devotedly attached. If you had been there, Jack, you wouldn't have known yourself. I should have excelled as a criminal lawyer, if I had not turned my attention to a different branch of jurisprudence.

Miss Marjorie asked all manner of leading questions concerning you. It did not occur to me then, but it struck me forcibly

afterwards, that she evinced a singular interest in the conversation. When I got back to my room, I recalled how eagerly she leaned forward, with her full, snowy throat in strong moonlight, listening to what I said. Positively, I think I made her like you!

Miss Daw is a girl whom you would like immensely, I can tell you that. A beauty without affectation, a high and tender nature—if one can read the soul in the face. And the old colonel is a noble character too.

I am glad that the Daws are such pleasant people. The Pines is an isolated spot, and my resources are few. I fear I should have found life here somewhat monotonous before long, with no other society than that of my excellent sire. It is true, I might have made a target of the defenceless invalid; but I haven't a taste for artillery, *moi*.

VI.

JOHN FLEMMING TO EDWARD DELANEY.

August 17, 1872.

FOR a man who hasn't a taste for artillery, it occurs to me, my friend, you are keeping up a pretty lively fire on my inner works. But go on. Cynicism is a small brass field-piece that eventually bursts and kills the artilleryman.

You may abuse me as much as you like, and I'll not complain; for I don't know what I should do without your letters. They are curing me. I haven't hurled anything at Watkins since last Sunday, partly because I have grown more amiable under your teaching, and partly because Watkins captured my ammunition one night, and carried it off to the library. He is rapidly losing the habit he had acquired of dodging whenever I rub my ear, or make any slight motion with my right arm. He is still

suggestive of the wine-cellar, however. You may break, you may shatter Watkins, if you will, but the scent of the Roederer will hang round him still.

Ned, that Miss Daw must be a charming person. I should certainly like her. I like her already. When you spoke in your first letter of seeing a young girl swinging in a hammock under your chamber window, I was somehow strangely drawn to her. I cannot account for it in the least. What you have subsequently written of Miss Daw has strengthened the impression. You seem to be describing a woman I have known in some previous state of existence, or dreamed of in this. Upon my word, if you were to send me her photograph, I believe I should recognise her at a glance. Her manner, that listening attitude, her traits of character, as you indicate them, the light hair and the dark eyes—they are all familiar things to me. Asked a lot of questions, did she? Curious about me? That is strange.

You would laugh in your sleeve, you wretched old cynic, if you knew how I lie awake nights, with my gas turned down to a star, thinking of The Pines and the house across the road. How cool it must be down

there! I long for the salt smell in the air. I picture the colonel smoking his cheroot on the piazza. I send you and Miss Daw off on afternoon rambles along the beach. Sometimes I let you stroll with her under the elms in the moonlight, for you are great friends by this time, I take it, and see each other every day. I know your ways and your manners! Then I fall into a truculent mood, and would like to destroy somebody. Have you noticed anything in the shape of a lover hanging around the colonial Lares and Penates? Does that lieutenant of the horse-marines or that young Stillwater parson visit the house much? Not that I am pining for news of them, but any gossip of the kind would be in order. I wonder, Ned, you don't fall in love with Miss Daw. I am ripe to do it myself. Speaking of photographs, couldn't you manage to slip one of her *cartes-de-visite* from her album—she must have an album, you know—and send it to me? I will return it before it could be missed. That's a good fellow! Did the mare arrive safe and sound? It will be a capital animal this autumn for Central Park.

Oh—my leg? I forgot about my leg. It's better.

VII.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING.

August 20, 1872.

YOU are correct in your surmises. I am on the most friendly terms with our neighbours. The colonel and my father smoke their afternoon cigar together in our sitting-room or on the piazza opposite, and I pass an hour or two of the day or the evening with the daughter. I am more and more struck by the beauty, modesty, and intelligence of Miss Daw.

You ask me why I do not fall in love with her. I will be frank, Jack: I have thought of that. She is young, rich, accomplished, uniting in herself more attractions, mental and personal, than I can recall in any girl of my acquaintance; but she lacks the something that would be necessary to inspire in me that kind of interest. Possessing this unknown quantity, a woman neither beautiful nor wealthy nor very

young could bring me to her feet. But not Miss Daw. If we were shipwrecked together on an uninhabited island—let me suggest a tropical island, for it costs no more to be picturesque—I would build her a bamboo hut, I would fetch her bread-fruit and cocoa-nuts, I would fry yams for her, I would lure the ingenuous turtle and make her nourishing soups, but I wouldn't make love to her—not under eighteen months. I would like to have her for a sister, that I might shield her and counsel her, and spend half my income on old thread-lace and camel's-hair shawls. (We are off the island now.) If such were not my feeling, there would still be an obstacle to my loving Miss Daw. A greater misfortune could scarcely befall me than to love her. Flemming, I am about to make a revelation that will astonish you. I may be all wrong in my premises, and consequently in my conclusions; but you shall judge.

That night when I returned to my room after the croquet party at the Daws', and was thinking over the trivial events of the evening, I was suddenly impressed by the air of eager attention with which Miss Daw had followed my account of your accident.

I think I mentioned this to you. Well, the next morning, as I went to mail my letter, I overtook Miss Daw on the road to Rye, where the post-office is, and accompanied her thither and back, an hour's walk. The conversation again turned on you, and again I remarked that inexplicable look of interest which had lighted up her face the previous evening. Since then, I have seen Miss Daw perhaps ten times, perhaps oftener, and on each occasion I found that when I was not speaking of you, or your sister, or some person or place associated with you, I was not holding her attention. She would be absent-minded, her eyes would wander away from me to the sea, or to some distant object in the landscape; her fingers would play with the leaves of a book in a way that convinced me she was not listening. At these moments if I abruptly changed the theme—I did it several times as an experiment—and dropped some remark about my friend Flemming, then the sombre blue eyes would come back to me instantly.

Now, is not this the oddest thing in the world? No, not the oddest. The effect which you tell me was produced on you by my casual mention of an unknown girl

swinging in a hammock is certainly as strange. You can conjecture how that passage in your letter of Friday startled me. Is it possible, then, that two people who have never met, and who are hundreds of miles apart, can exert a magnetic influence on each other? I have read of such psychological phenomena, but never credited them. I leave the solution of the problem to you. As for myself, all other things being favourable, it would be impossible for me to fall in love with a woman who listens to me only when I am talking of my friend!

I am not aware that any one is paying marked attention to my fair neighbour. The lieutenant of the navy—he is stationed at Rivermouth — sometimes drops in of an evening, and sometimes the rector from Stillwater; the lieutenant the oftener. He was there last night. I should not be surprised if he had an eye to the heiress; but he is not formidable. Mistress Daw carries a neat little spear of irony, and the honest lieutenant seems to have a particular facility for impaling himself on the point of it. He is not dangerous, I should say; though I have known a woman to satirise a man for years, and marry him after all. Decidedly,

the lowly rector is not dangerous ; yet, again, who has not seen Cloth of Frieze victorious in the lists where Cloth of Gold went down ?

As to the photograph. There is an exquisite ivorytype of Marjorie, in passe-partout, on the drawing-room mantel-piece. It would be missed at once if taken. I would do anything reasonable for you, Jack ; but I 've no burning desire to be hauled up before the local justice of the peace on a charge of petty larceny.

P.S.—Enclosed is a spray of mignonette, which I advise you to treat tenderly. Yes, we talked of you again last night, as usual. It is becoming a little dreary for me.

VIII.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING.

August 22, 1872.

YOUR letter in reply to my last has occupied my thoughts all the morning. I do not know what to think. Do you mean to say that you are seriously half in love with a woman whom you have never seen —with a shadow, a chimera? for what else can Miss Daw be to you? I do not understand it at all. I understand neither you nor her.

You are a couple of ethereal beings moving in finer air than I can breathe with my commonplace lungs. Such delicacy of sentiment is something that I admire without comprehending. I am bewildered. I am of the earth earthy, and I find myself in the incongruous position of having to do with mere souls, with natures so finely tempered that I run some risk of shattering them in

my awkwardness. I am as Caliban among the spirits!

Reflecting on your letter, I am not sure that it is wise in me to continue this correspondence. But no, Jack; I do wrong to doubt the good sense that forms the basis of your character. You are deeply interested in Miss Daw; you feel that she is a person whom you may perhaps greatly admire when you know her: at the same time you bear in mind that the chances are ten to five that, when you do come to know her, she will fall far short of your ideal, and you will not care for her in the least. Look at it in this sensible light, and I will hold back nothing from you.

Yesterday afternoon my father and myself rode over to Rivermouth with the Daws. A heavy rain in the morning had cooled the atmosphere and laid the dust. To Rivermouth is a drive of eight miles, along a winding road lined all the way with wild barberry-bushes. I never saw anything more brilliant than these bushes, the green of the foliage and the faint blush of the berries intensified by the rain. The colonel drove, with my father in front, Miss Daw and I on the back seat. I resolved that for

the first five miles your name should not pass my lips. I was amused by the artful attempts she made, at the start, to break through my reticence. Then a silence fell upon her; and then she became suddenly gay. That keenness which I enjoyed so much when it was exercised on the lieutenant was not so satisfactory directed against myself. Miss Daw has great sweetness of disposition, but she can be disagreeable. She is like the young lady in the rhyme, with the curl on her forehead—

> "When she is good,
> She is very, very good,
> And when she is bad, she is horrid!"

I kept to my resolution, however; but on the return home I relented, and talked of your mare! Miss Daw is going to try a side-saddle on Margot some morning. The animal is a trifle too light for my weight. By the by, I nearly forgot to say that Miss Daw sat for a picture yesterday to a Rivermouth artist. If the negative turns out well, I am to have a copy. So our ends will be accomplished without crime. I wish, though, I could send you the ivorytype in the drawing-room; it is cleverly coloured,

and would give you an idea of her hair and eyes, which of course the other will not.

No, Jack, the spray of mignonette did not come from me. A man of twenty-eight doesn't enclose flowers in his letters—to another man. But don't attach too much significance to the circumstance. She gives sprays of mignonette to the rector, sprays to the lieutenant. She has even given a rose from her bosom to your slave. It is her jocund nature to scatter flowers, like Spring.

If my letters sometimes read disjointedly, you must understand that I never finish one at a sitting, but write at intervals, when the mood is on me.

The mood is not on me now.

IX.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING.

August 23, 1872.

I HAVE just returned from the strangest interview with Marjorie. She has all but confessed to me her interest in you. But with what modesty and dignity! Her words elude my pen as I attempt to put them on paper; and, indeed, it was not so much what she said as her manner; and that I cannot reproduce. Perhaps it was of a piece with the strangeness of this whole business, that she should tacitly acknowledge to a third party the love she feels for a man she has never beheld! But I have lost, through your aid, the faculty of being surprised. I accept things as people do in dreams. Now that I am again in my room, it all appears like an illusion—the black masses of Rembrandtish shadow under the trees, the fireflies whirling in Pyrrhic dances among the

shrubbery, the sea over there, Marjorie sitting on the hammock !

It is past midnight, and I am too sleepy to write more.

Thursday Morning.

My father has suddenly taken it into his head to spend a few days at the Shoals. In the meanwhile you will not hear from me. I see Marjorie walking in the garden with the colonel. I wish I could speak to her alone, but shall probably not have an opportunity before we leave.

X.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING.

August 28, 1872.

YOU were passing into your second childhood, were you? Your intellect was so reduced that my epistolary gifts seemed quite considerable to you, did they? I rise superior to the sarcasm in your favour of the 11th instant, when I notice that five days' silence on my part is sufficient to throw you into the depths of despondency.

We returned only this morning from Appledore, that enchanted island—at four dollars per day. I find on my desk three letters from you! Evidently there is no lingering doubt in *your* mind as to the pleasure I derive from your correspondence. These letters are undated, but in what I take to be the latest are two passages that require my consideration. You will pardon my candour, dear Flemming, but the convic-

tion forces itself upon me that as your leg grows stronger your head becomes weaker. You ask my advice on a certain point. I will give it. In my opinion you could do nothing more unwise than to address a note to Miss Daw, thanking her for the flower. It would, I am sure, offend her delicacy beyond pardon. She knows you only through me; you are to her an abstraction, a figure in a dream—a dream from which the faintest shock would awaken her. Of course, if you enclose a note to me, and insist on its delivery, I shall deliver it; but I advise you not to do so.

You say you are able, with the aid of a cane, to walk about your chamber, and that you purpose to come to The Pines the instant Dillon thinks you strong enough to stand the journey. Again I advise you not to. Do you not see that, every hour you remain away, Marjorie's glamour deepens, and your influence over her increases? You will ruin everything by precipitancy. Wait until you are entirely recovered; in any case, do not come without giving me warning. I fear the effect of your abrupt advent here—under the circumstances.

Miss Daw was evidently glad to see us

back again, and gave me both hands in the frankest way. She stopped at the door a moment this afternoon in the carriage; she had been over to Rivermouth for her pictures. Unluckily the photographer had spilt some acid on the plate, and she was obliged to give him another sitting. I have an intuition that something is troubling Marjorie. She had an abstracted air not usual with her. However, it may be only my fancy. . . . I end this, leaving several things unsaid, to accompany my father on one of those long walks which are now his chief medicine—and mine!

XI.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING.

August 29, 1872.

I WRITE in great haste to tell you what has taken place here since my letter of last night. I am in the utmost perplexity. Only one thing is plain—*you* must not dream of coming to The Pines. Marjorie has told her father everything! I saw her for a few minutes, an hour ago, in the garden; and, as near as I could gather from her confused statement, the facts are these: Lieutenant Bradly—that's the naval officer stationed at Rivermouth—has been paying court to Miss Daw for some time past, but not so much to her liking as to that of the colonel, who it seems is an old friend of the young gentleman's father. Yesterday (I knew she was in some trouble when she drove up to our gate) the colonel spoke to Marjorie of Bradly—urged his suit, I infer.

Marjorie expressed her dislike for the lieutenant with characteristic frankness, and finally confessed to her father—well, I really do not know what she confessed. It must have been the vaguest of confessions, and must have sufficiently puzzled the colonel. At any rate, it exasperated him. I suppose I am implicated in the matter, and that the colonel feels bitterly towards me. I do not see why: I have carried no messages between you and Miss Daw; I have behaved with the greatest discretion. I can find no flaw anywhere in my proceeding. I do not see that anybody has done anything—except the colonel himself.

It is probable, nevertheless, that the friendly relations between the two houses will be broken off. "A plague o' both your houses," say you. I will keep you informed, as well as I can, of what occurs over the way. We shall remain here until the second week in September. Stay where you are, or, at all events, do not dream of joining me. . . . Colonel Daw is sitting on the piazza looking rather wicked. I have not seen Marjorie since I parted with her in the garden.

XII.

EDWARD DELANEY TO THOMAS DILLON, M.D., MADISON SQUARE, NEW YORK.

August 30, 1872.

MY DEAR DOCTOR,—If you have any influence over Flemming, I beg of you to exert it to prevent his coming to this place at present. There are circumstances, which I will explain to you before long, that make it of the first importance that he should not come into this neighbourhood. His appearance here, I speak advisedly, would be disastrous to him. In urging him to remain in New York, or to go to some inland resort, you will be doing him and me a real service. Of course you will not mention my name in this connection. You know me well enough, my dear doctor, to be assured that, in begging your secret co-operation, I have reasons that will meet your entire approval when they are made plain to you. We shall return to town on the 15th of next month, and

my first duty will be to present myself at your hospitable door and satisfy your curiosity, if I have excited it. My father, I am glad to state, has so greatly improved that he can no longer be regarded as an invalid. With great esteem, I am, etc., etc.

XIII.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING.

August 31, 1872.

YOUR letter, announcing your mad determination to come here, has just reached me. I beseech you to reflect a moment. The step would be fatal to your interests and hers You would furnish just cause for irritation to R. W. D. ; and, though he loves Marjorie devotedly, he is capable of going to any lengths if opposed. You would not like, I am convinced, to be the means of causing him to treat *her* with severity. That would be the result of your presence at The Pines at this juncture. I am annoyed to be obliged to point out these things to you. We are on very delicate ground, Jack ; the situation is critical, and the slightest mistake in a move would cost us the game. If you consider it worth the winning, be patient. Trust a little to my sagacity. Wait and see

what happens. Moreover, I understand from Dillon that you are in no condition to take so long a journey. He thinks the air of the coast would be the worst thing possible for you; that you ought to go inland, if anywhere. Be advised by me. Be advised by Dillon.

XIV.

TELEGRAMS.

September 1, 1872.

1.—To Edward Delaney.

LETTER received. Dillon be hanged. I think I ought to be on the ground.

J. F.

2.—To John Flemming.

Stay where you are. You would only complicate matters. Do not move until you hear from me. E. D.

3.—To Edward Delaney.

My being at The Pines could be kept secret. I must see her. J. F.

4.—To John Flemming.

Do not think of it. It would be useless. R. W. D. has locked M. in her room. You would not be able to effect an interview.

E. D.

5.—To Edward Delaney.

Looked her in her room. Good God. That settles the question. I shall leave by the twelve-fifteen express. J. F.

XV.

THE ARRIVAL.

ON the second day of September 1872, as the down express, due at 3.40, left the station at Hampton, a young man, leaning on the shoulder of a servant, whom he addressed as Watkins, stepped from the platform into a hack, and requested to be driven to "The Pines." On arriving at the gate of a modest farm-house, a few miles from the station, the young man descended with difficulty from the carriage, and, casting a hasty glance across the road, seemed much impressed by some peculiarity in the landscape. Again leaning on the shoulder of the person Watkins, he walked to the door of the farm-house and inquired for Mr. Edward Delaney. He was informed by the aged man who answered his knock that Mr. Edward Delaney had gone to Boston the day

before, but that Mr. Jonas Delaney was within. This information did not appear satisfactory to the stranger, who inquired if Mr. Edward Delaney had left any message for Mr. John Flemming. There *was* a letter for Mr. Flemming, if he were that person. After a brief absence the aged man re-appeared with a letter.

XVI.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING.

September 1, 1872.

I AM horror-stricken at what I have done! When I began this correspondence I had no other purpose than to relieve the tedium of your sick-chamber. Dillon told me to cheer you up. I tried to. I thought that you entered into the spirit of the thing. I had no idea, until within a few days, that you were taking matters *au grand sérieux.*

What can I say? I am in sackcloth and ashes. I am a pariah, a dog of an outcast. I tried to make a little romance to interest you, something soothing and idyllic, and, by Jove! I have done it only too well! My father doesn't know a word of this, so don't jar the old gentleman any more than you can help. I fly from the wrath to come—when you arrive! For oh! dear Jack, there isn't any colonial mansion on the other side of the road, there isn't any piazza, there isn't any hammock—there isn't any Marjorie Daw!

MISS MEHETABEL'S SON

I.

THE OLD TAVERN AT BAYLEY'S FOUR-CORNERS.

YOU will not find Greenton, or Bayley's Four-Corners, as it is more usually designated, on any map of New England that I know of. It is not a town; it is not even a village; it is merely an absurd hotel. The almost indescribable place called Greenton is at the intersection of four roads, in the heart of New Hampshire, twenty miles from the nearest settlement of note, and ten miles from any railway station. A good location for a hotel, you will say. Precisely; but there has always been a hotel there, and for the last dozen years it has been pretty well patronised—by one boarder. Not to trifle with an intelligent public, I will state at once that, in the early part of this century, Greenton was a

point at which the mail-coach on the Great Northern Route stopped to change horses and allow the passengers to dine. People in the county, wishing to take the early mail Portsmouth-ward, put up overnight at the old tavern, famous for its irreproachable larder and soft feather-beds. The tavern at that time was kept by Jonathan Bayley, who rivalled his wallet in growing corpulent, and in due time passed away. At his death, the establishment, which included a farm, fell into the hands of a son-in-law. Now, though Bayley left his son-in-law a hotel—which sounds handsome—he left him no guests; for at about the period of the old man's death the old stage-coach died also. Apoplexy carried off one, and steam the other. Thus, by a sudden swerve in the tide of progress, the tavern at the Corners found itself high and dry, like a wreck on a sand-bank. Shortly after this event, or may be contemporaneously, there was some attempt to build a town at Greenton; but it apparently failed, if eleven cellars choked up with *débris* and overgrown with burdocks are any indication of failure. The farm, however, was a good farm, as things go in New Hampshire, and Tobias Sewell,

the son-in-law, could afford to snap his fingers at the travelling public if they came near enough—which they never did.

The hotel remains to-day pretty much the same as when Jonathan Bayley handed in his accounts in 1840, except that Sewell has from time to time sold the furniture of some of the upper chambers to bridal couples in the neighbourhood. The bar is still open, and the parlour door says PARLOUR in tall black letters. Now and then a passing drover looks in at that lonely bar-room, where a high-shouldered bottle of Santa Cruz rum ogles with a peculiarly knowing air a shrivelled lemon on a shelf; now and then a farmer rides across country to talk crops and stock and take a friendly glass with Tobias; and now and then a circus caravan with speckled ponies, or a menagerie with a soggy elephant, halts under the swinging sign, on which there is a dim mail-coach with four phantomish horses driven by a portly gentleman whose head has been washed off by the rain. Other customers there are none, except that one regular boarder whom I have mentioned.

If misery makes a man acquainted with strange bed-fellows, it is equally certain that

the profession of surveyor and civil engineer often takes one into undreamed-of localities. I had never heard of Greenton until my duties sent me there, and kept me there two weeks in the dreariest season of the year. I do not think I would, of my own volition, have selected Greenton for a fortnight's sojourn at any time; but now the business is over, I shall never regret the circumstances that made me the guest of Tobias Sewell, and brought me into intimate relations with Miss Mehetabel's Son.

It was a black October night in the year of grace 1872, that discovered me standing in front of the old tavern at the Corners. Though the ten miles' ride from K—— had been depressing, especially the last five miles, on account of the cold autumnal rain that had set in, I felt a pang of regret on hearing the rickety open waggon turn round in the road and roll off in the darkness. There were no lights visible anywhere, and only for the big, shapeless mass of something in front of me, which the driver had said was the hotel, I should have fancied that I had been set down by the roadside. I was wet to the skin, and in no amiable humour; and not being able to find bell-pull or

knocker, or even a door, I belaboured the side of the house with my heavy walking-stick. In a minute or two I saw a light flickering somewhere aloft, then I heard the sound of a window opening, followed by an exclamation of disgust as a blast of wind extinguished the candle which had given me an instantaneous picture *en silhouette* of a man leaning out of a casement.

"I say, what do you want, down there?" inquired an unprepossessing voice.

"I want to come in; I want a supper, and a bed, and numberless things."

"This isn't no time of night to go rousing honest folks out of their sleep. Who are you, anyway?"

The question, superficially considered, was a very simple one, and I, of all people in the world, ought to have been able to answer it off-hand; but it staggered me. Strangely enough, there came drifting across my memory the lettering on the back of a metaphysical work which I had seen years before on a shelf in the Astor Library. Owing to an unpremeditatedly funny collocation of title and author, the lettering read as follows: "Who am I? Jones." Evidently it had puzzled Jones to know

who he was, or he wouldn't have written a book about it, and come to so lame and impotent a conclusion. It certainly puzzled me at that instant to define my identity. "Thirty years ago," I reflected, "I was nothing; fifty years hence I shall be nothing again, humanly speaking. In the meantime who am I, sure enough?" It had never before occurred to me what an indefinite article I was. I wish it had not occurred to me then. Standing there in the rain and darkness, I wrestled vainly with the problem, and was constrained to fall back upon a Yankee expedient.

"Isn't this a hotel?" I asked finally.

"Well, it is a sort of hotel," said the voice doubtfully. My hesitation and prevarication had apparently not inspired my interlocutor with confidence in me.

"Then let me in. I have just driven over from K—— in this infernal rain. I am wet through and through."

"But what do you want here at the Corners? What 's your business? People don't come here, leastways in the middle of the night."

"It isn't in the middle of the night," I returned, incensed. "I come on business

connected with the new road. I 'm the superintendent of the works."

"Oh !"

"And if you don't open the door at once, I 'll raise the whole neighbourhood—and then go to the other hotel."

When I said that, I supposed Greenton was a village with a population of at least three or four thousand, and was wondering vaguely at the absence of lights and other signs of human habitation. Surely, I thought, all the people cannot be abed and asleep at half-past ten o'clock : perhaps I am in the business section of the town, among the shops.

"You jest wait," said the voice above.

This request was not devoid of a certain accent of menace, and I braced myself for a sortie on the part of the besieged, if he had any such hostile intent. Presently a door opened at the very place where I least expected a door, at the farther end of the building, in fact, and a man in his shirt-sleeves, shielding a candle with his left hand, appeared on the threshold. I passed quickly into the house, with Mr. Tobias Sewell (for this was Mr. Sewell) at my heels, and found myself in a long, low-studded bar-room.

There were two chairs drawn up before the hearth, on which a huge hemlock back-log was still smouldering, and on the unpainted deal counter contiguous stood two cloudy glasses with bits of lemon-peel in the bottom, hinting at recent libations. Against the discoloured wall over the bar hung a yellowed handbill, in a warped frame, announcing that "the Next Annual N. H. Agricultural Fair" would take place on the 10th of September 1841. There was no other furniture or decoration in this dismal apartment, except the cobwebs which festooned the ceiling, hanging down here and there like stalactites.

Mr. Sewell set the candlestick on the mantel-shelf, and threw some pine-knots on the fire, which immediately broke into a blaze, and showed him to be a lank, narrow-chested man, past sixty, with sparse, steel-grey hair, and small, deep-set eyes, perfectly round, like a fish's, and of no particular colour. His chief personal characteristics seemed to be too much feet and not enough teeth. His sharply cut, but rather simple face, as he turned it towards me, wore a look of interrogation. I replied to his mute inquiry by taking out my pocket-book and

handing him my business card, which he held up to the candle and perused with great deliberation.

"You 're a civil engineer, are you?" he said, displaying his gums, which gave his countenance an expression of almost infantile innocence. He made no further audible remark, but mumbled between his thin lips something which an imaginative person might have construed into "If you 're a civil engineer, I 'll be blessed if I wouldn't like to see an uncivil one!"

Mr. Sewell's growl, however, was worse than his bite—owing to his lack of teeth probably—for he very good-naturedly set himself to work preparing supper for me. After a slice of cold ham, and a warm punch, to which my chilled condition gave a grateful flavour, I went to bed in a distant chamber in a most amiable mood, feeling satisfied that Jones was a donkey to bother himself about his identity.

When I awoke, the sun was several hours high. My bed faced a window, and by raising myself on one elbow I could look out on what I expected would be the main street. To my astonishment I beheld a lonely country road winding up a sterile hill and disap-

pearing over the ridge. In a corn-field at the right of the road was a small private graveyard, enclosed by a crumbling stone wall with a red gate. The only thing suggestive of life was this little corner lot occupied by death. I got out of bed and went to the other window. There I had an uninterrupted view of twelve miles of open landscape, with Mount Agamenticus in the purple distance. Not a house or a spire in sight. "Well," I exclaimed, "Greenton doesn't appear to be a very closely packed metropolis!" That rival hotel with which I had threatened Mr. Sewell overnight was not a deadly weapon, looking at it by daylight. "By Jove!" I reflected, "may be I 'm in the wrong place." But there, tacked against a panel of the bedroom door, was a faded time-table dated Greenton, August 1, 1839.

I smiled all the time I was dressing, and went smiling downstairs, where I found Mr. Sewell, assisted by one of the fair sex in the first bloom of her eightieth year, serving breakfast for me on a small table—in the bar-room!

"I overslept myself this morning," I remarked apologetically, "and I see that I

am putting you to some trouble. In future, if you will have me called, I will take my meals at the usual *table-d'hôte.*"

"At the what?" said Mr. Sewell.

"I mean with the other boarders."

Mr. Sewell paused in the act of lifting a chop from the fire, and, resting the point of his fork against the woodwork of the mantelpiece, grinned from ear to ear.

"Bless you! there isn't any other boarders. There hasn't been anybody put up here sence—let me see—sence father-in-law died, and that was in the fall of '40. To be sure, there's Silas; *he*'s a regular boarder; but I don't count him."

Mr. Sewell then explained how the tavern had lost its custom when the old stage line was broken up by the railroad. The introduction of steam was, in Mr. Sewell's estimation, a fatal error. "Jest killed local business. Carried it off, I'm darned if I know where. The whole country has been sort o' retrograding ever sence steam was invented."

"You spoke of having one boarder," I said.

"Silas? Yes; he come here the summer 'Tilda died—she that was 'Tilda Bayley—

and he 's here yet, going on thirteen year. He couldn't live any longer with the old man. Between you and I, old Clem Jaffrey, Silas's father, was a hard nut. Yes," said Mr. Sewell, crooking his elbow in inimitable pantomime, "altogether too often. Found dead in the road hugging a three-gallon demijohn. *Habeas corpus* in the barn," added Mr. Sewell, intending, I presume, to intimate that a *post-mortem* examination had been deemed necessary. "Silas," he resumed, in that respectful tone which one should always adopt when speaking of capital, "is a man of considerable property; lives on his interest, and keeps a hoss and shay. He 's a great scholar, too, Silas; takes all the pe-ri-odicals and the *Police Gazette* regular."

Mr. Sewell was turning over a third chop, when the door opened and a stoutish, middle-aged little gentleman, clad in deep black, stepped into the room.

"Silas Jaffrey," said Mr. Sewell, with a comprehensive sweep of his arm, picking up me and the new-comer on one fork, so to speak. "Be acquainted!"

Mr. Jaffrey advanced briskly, and gave me his hand with unlooked-for cordiality.

He was a dapper little man, with a head as round and nearly as bald as an orange, and not unlike an orange, in complexion, either; he had twinkling grey eyes and a pronounced Roman nose, the numerous freckles upon which were deepened by his funereal dress coat and trousers. He reminded me of Alfred de Musset's blackbird, which, with its yellow beak and sombre plumage, looked like an undertaker eating an omelet.

"Silas will take care of you," said Mr. Sewell, taking down his hat from a peg behind the door. "I've got the cattle to look after. Tell him, if you want anything."

While I ate my breakfast, Mr. Jaffrey hopped up and down the narrow bar-room and chirped away as blithely as a bird on a cherry-bough, occasionally ruffling with his fingers a slight fringe of auburn hair which stood up pertly round his head and seemed to possess a luminous quality of its own.

"Don't I find it a little slow up here at the Corners? Not at all, my dear sir. I am in the thick of life up here. So many interesting things going on all over the world —inventions, discoveries, spirits, railroad disasters, mysterious homicides. Poets, murderers, musicians, statesmen, distin-

guished travellers, prodigies of all kinds turning up everywhere. Very few events or persons escape me. I take six daily city papers, thirteen weekly journals, all the monthly magazines, and two quarterlies. I could not get along with less. I couldn't if you asked me. I never feel lonely. How can I, being on intimate terms, as it were, with thousands and thousands of people? There 's that young woman out West. What an entertaining creature *she* is!—now in Missouri, now in Indiana, and now in Minnesota, always on the go, and all the time shedding needles from various parts of her body as if she really enjoyed it! Then there 's that versatile patriarch who walks hundreds of miles and saws thousands of feet of wood before breakfast, and shows no signs of giving out. Then there 's that remarkable, one may say that historical coloured woman who knew Benjamin Franklin, and fought at the battle of Bunk—no, it is the old negro man who fought at Bunker Hill, a mere infant, of course, at that period. Really, now, it is quite curious to observe how that venerable female slave—formerly an African princess—is repeatedly dying in her hundred and eleventh year, and coming

to life again punctually every six months in the small-type paragraphs. Are you aware, sir, that within the last twelve years no fewer than two hundred and eighty-seven of General Washington's coloured coachmen have died!"

For the soul of me I could not tell whether this quaint little gentleman was chaffing me or not. I laid down my knife and fork and stared at him.

"Then there are the mathematicians!" he cried vivaciously, without waiting for a reply. "I take great interest in them. Hear this!" and Mr. Jaffrey drew a newspaper from a pocket in the tail of his coat, and read as follows: "*It has been estimated that if all the candles manufactured by this eminent firm (Stearine & Co.) were placed end to end, they would reach 2 and ⅞ times around the globe.* Of course," continued Mr. Jaffrey, folding up the journal reflectively, "abstruse calculations of this kind are not, perhaps, of vital importance, but they indicate the intellectual activity of the age. Seriously, now," he said, halting in front of the table, "what with books and papers and drives about the country, I do not find the days too long, though I seldom

see any one, except when I go over to K—— for my mail. Existence may be very full to a man who stands a little aside from the tumult and watches it with philosophic eye. Possibly he may see more of the battle than those who are in the midst of the action. Once I was struggling with the crowd, as eager and undaunted as the best; perhaps I should have been struggling still. Indeed, I know my life would have been very different now if I had married Mehetabel—if I had married Mehetabel."

His vivacity was gone, a sudden cloud had come over his bright face, his figure seemed to have collapsed, the light seemed to have faded out of his hair. With a shuffling step, the very antithesis of his brisk, elastic tread, he turned to the door and passed into the road

"Well," I said to myself, "if Greenton had forty thousand inhabitants, it couldn't turn out a more astonishing old party than that

II.

THE CASE OF SILAS JAFFREY.

A MAN with a passion for *bric-à-brac* is always stumbling over antique bronzes, intaglios, mosaics, and daggers of the time of Benvenuto Cellini; the bibliophile finds creamy vellum folios and rare Alduses and Elzevirs waiting for him at unsuspected book-stalls; the numismatist has but to stretch forth his palm to have priceless coins drop into it. My own weakness is odd people, and I am constantly encountering them. It was plain that I had unearthed a couple of very queer specimens at Bayley's Four-Corners. I saw that a fortnight afforded me too brief an opportunity to develop the richness of both, and I resolved to devote my spare time to Mr. Jaffrey alone, instinctively recognising in him an unfamiliar species. My professional work in the vicinity of

Greenton left my evenings and occasionally an afternoon unoccupied; these intervals I purposed to employ in studying and classifying my fellow-boarder. It was necessary, as a preliminary step, to learn something of his previous history, and to this end I addressed myself to Mr. Sewell that same night.

"I do not want to seem inquisitive," I said to the landlord, as he was fastening up the bar, which, by the way, was the *salle à manger* and general sitting-room—"I do not want to seem inquisitive, but your friend Mr. Jaffrey dropped a remark this morning at breakfast which—which was not altogether clear to me."

"About Mehetabel?" asked Mr. Sewell uneasily.

"Yes."

"Well, I wish he wouldn't!"

"He was friendly enough in the course of conversation to hint to me that he had not married the young woman, and seemed to regret it."

"No, he didn't marry Mehetabel."

"May I inquire *why* he didn't marry Mehetabel?"

"Never asked her. Might have married the girl forty times. Old Elkins's daughter,

over at K——. She 'd have had him quick enough. Seven years, off and on, he kept company with Mehetabel, and then she died."

"And he never asked her?"

"He shilly-shallied. Perhaps he didn't think of it. When she was dead and gone, then Silas was struck all of a heap—and that 's all about it."

Obviously Mr. Sewell did not intend to tell me anything more, and obviously there was more to tell. The topic was plainly disagreeable to him for some reason or other, and that unknown reason of course piqued my curiosity.

As I was absent from dinner and supper that day, I did not meet Mr. Jaffrey again until the following morning at breakfast. He had recovered his bird-like manner, and was full of a mysterious assassination that had just taken place in New York, all the thrilling details of which were at his fingers' ends. It was at once comical and sad to see this harmless old gentleman with his naïve, benevolent countenance, and his thin hair flaming up in a semicircle, like the foot-lights at a theatre, revelling in the intricacies of the unmentionable deed.

"You come up to my room to-night," he cried, with horrid glee, "and I'll give you my theory of the murder. I'll make it as clear as day to you that it was the detective himself who fired the three pistol shots."

It was not so much the desire to have this point elucidated as to make a closer study of Mr. Jaffrey that led me to accept his invitation. Mr. Jaffrey's bedroom was in an L of the building, and was in no way noticeable except for the numerous files of newspapers neatly arranged against the blank spaces of the walls, and a huge pile of old magazines which stood in one corner, reaching nearly up to the ceiling, and threatening to topple over each instant, like the Leaning Tower at Pisa. There were green paper shades at the windows, some faded chintz valances about the bed, and two or three easy-chairs covered with chintz. On a black-walnut shelf between the windows lay a choice collection of meerschaum and brier-wood pipes.

Filling one of the chocolate-coloured bowls for me and another for himself, Mr. Jaffrey began prattling; but not about the murder, which appeared to have flown out of his

mind. In fact, I do not remember that the topic was even touched upon, either then or afterwards.

"Cosey nest this," said Mr. Jaffrey, glancing complacently over the apartment. "What is more cheerful, now, in the fall of the year, than an open wood-fire? Do you hear those little chirps and twitters coming out of that piece of apple-wood? Those are the ghosts of the robins and bluebirds that sang upon the bough when it was in blossom last spring. In summer whole flocks of them come fluttering about the fruit-trees under the window: so I have singing-birds all the year round. I take it very easy here, I can tell you, summer and winter. Not much society. Tobias is not, perhaps, what one would term a great intellectual force, but he means well. He 's a realist—believes in coming down to what he calls 'the hard pan;' but his heart is in the right place, and he 's very kind to me. The wisest thing I ever did in my life was to sell out my grain business over at K——, thirteen years ago, and settle down at the Corners. When a man has made a competency, what does he want more? Besides, at that time an event occurred which destroyed

any ambition I may have had. Mehetabel died."

"The lady you were engaged to?"

"N-o, not precisely engaged. I think it was quite understood between us, though nothing had been said on the subject. Typhoid," added Mr. Jaffrey, in a low voice.

For several minutes he smoked in silence, a vague, troubled look playing over his countenance. Presently this passed away, and he fixed his grey eyes speculatively upon my face.

"If I had married Mehetabel," said Mr. Jaffrey slowly, and then he hesitated. I blew a ring of smoke into the air, and, resting my pipe on my knee, dropped into an attitude of attention. "If I had married Mehetabel, you know, we should have had —ahem!—a family."

"Very likely," I assented, vastly amused at this unexpected turn.

"A Boy!" exclaimed Mr. Jaffrey explosively.

"By all means, certainly, a son."

"Great trouble about naming the boy. Mehetabel's family want him named Elkanah Elkins, after her grandfather; I want

him named Andrew Jackson. We compromise by christening him Elkanah Elkins Andrew Jackson Jaffrey. Rather a long name for such a short little fellow," said Mr. Jaffrey musingly.

"Andy isn't a bad nickname," I suggested.

"Not at all. We call him Andy, in the family. Somewhat fractious at first—colic and things. I suppose it is right, or it wouldn't be so; but the usefulness of measles, mumps, croup, whooping-cough, scarlatina, and fits is not clear to the parental eye. I wish Andy would be a model infant, and dodge the whole lot."

This supposititious child, born within the last few minutes, was plainly assuming the proportions of a reality to Mr. Jaffrey. I began to feel a little uncomfortable. I am, as I have said, a civil engineer, and it is not strictly in my line to assist at the births of infants, imaginary or otherwise. I pulled away vigorously at the pipe, and said nothing.

"What large blue eyes he has!" resumed Mr. Jaffrey, after a pause; "just like Hetty's; and the fair hair, too, like hers. How oddly certain distinctive features are

handed down in families! Sometimes a mouth, sometimes a turn of the eyebrow. Wicked little boys over at K——— have now and then derisively advised me to follow my nose. It would be an interesting thing to do. I should find my nose flying about the world, turning up unexpectedly here and there, dodging this branch of the family and reappearing in that, now jumping over one great-grandchild to fasten itself upon another, and never losing its individuality. Look at Andy. There 's Elkanah Elkins's chin to the life. Andy's chin is probably older than the Pyramids. Poor little thing," he cried, with sudden indescribable tenderness, "to lose his mother so early!" And Mr. Jaffrey's head sunk upon his breast, and his shoulders slanted forward, as if he were actually bending over the cradle of the child. The whole gesture and attitude was so natural that it startled me. The pipe slipped from my fingers and fell to the floor.

"Hush!" whispered Mr. Jaffrey, with a deprecating motion of his hand. "Andy 's asleep!"

He rose softly from the chair and, walking across the room on tiptoe, drew down the shade at the window through which the

moonlight was streaming. Then he returned to his seat, and remained gazing with half-closed eyes into the dropping embers.

I refilled my pipe and smoked in profound silence, wondering what would come next. But nothing came next. Mr. Jaffrey had fallen into so brown a study that, a quarter of an hour afterwards, when I wished him good-night and withdrew, I do not think he noticed my departure.

I am not what is called a man of imagination; it is my habit to exclude most things not capable of mathematical demonstration; but I am not without a certain psychological insight, and I think I understood Mr. Jaffrey's case. I could easily understand how a man with an unhealthy, sensitive nature, overwhelmed by sudden calamity, might take refuge in some forlorn place like this old tavern, and dream his life away. To such a man—brooding for ever on what might have been, and dwelling wholly in the realm of his fancies—the actual world might indeed become as a dream, and nothing seem real but his illusions. I dare say that thirteen years of Bayley's Four-Corners would have its effect upon me; though instead of conjuring up golden-haired children of the

Madonna, I should probably see gnomes and kobolds, and goblins engaged in hoisting false signals and misplacing switches for midnight express trains.

"No doubt," I said to myself that night, as I lay in bed, thinking over the matter, "this once possible but now impossible child is a great comfort to the old gentleman—a greater comfort, perhaps, than a real son would be. May be Andy will vanish with the shades and mists of night, he 's such an unsubstantial infant ; but if he doesn't, and Mr. Jaffrey finds pleasure in talking to me about his son, I shall humour the old fellow. It wouldn't be a Christian act to knock over his harmless fancy."

I was very impatient to see if Mr. Jaffrey's illusion would stand the test of daylight. It did. Elkanah Elkins Andrew Jackson Jaffrey was, so to speak, alive and kicking the next morning. On taking his seat at the breakfast-table, Mr. Jaffrey whispered to me that Andy had had a comfortable night.

"Silas!" said Mr. Sewell sharply, "what are you whispering about?"

Mr. Sewell was in an ill-humour ; perhaps he was jealous because I had passed the

evening in Mr. Jaffrey's room; but surely Mr. Sewell could not expect his boarders to go to bed at eight o'clock every night, as he did. From time to time during the meal Mr. Sewell regarded me unkindly out of the corner of his eye, and in helping me to the parsnips he poniarded them with quite a suggestive air. All this, however, did not prevent me from repairing to the door of Mr. Jaffrey's snuggery when night came.

"Well, Mr. Jaffrey, how's Andy this evening?"

"Got a tooth!" cried Mr. Jaffrey vivaciously.

"No!"

"Yes, he has! Just through. Gave the nurse a silver dollar. Standing reward for first tooth."

It was on the tip of my tongue to express surprise that an infant a day old should cut a tooth, when I suddenly recollected that Richard III. was born with teeth. Feeling myself to be on unfamiliar ground, I suppressed my criticism. It was well I did so, for in the next breath I was advised that half a year had elapsed since the previous evening.

"Andy's had a hard six months of it,"

said Mr. Jaffrey, with the well-known narrative air of fathers. "We 've brought him up by hand. His grandfather, by the way, was brought up by the bottle "—and brought down by it too, I added mentally, recalling Mr. Sewell's account of the old gentleman's tragic end.

Mr. Jaffrey then went on to give me a history of Andy's first six months, omitting no detail, however insignificant or irrelevant. This history I would in turn inflict upon the reader, if I were only certain that he is one of those dreadful parents who, under the ægis of friendship, bore you at a street-corner with that remarkable thing which Freddy said the other day, and insist on singing to you, at an evening party, the Iliad of Tommy's woes.

But to inflict this *enfantillage* upon the unmarried reader would be an act of wanton cruelty. So I pass over that part of Andy's biography, and, for the same reason, make no record of the next four or five interviews I had with Mr. Jaffrey. It will be sufficient to state that Andy glided from extreme infancy to early youth with astonishing celerity—at the rate of one year per night, if I remember correctly ; and—must I con-

fess it?—before the week came to an end, this invisible hobgoblin of a boy was only little less of a reality to me than to Mr. Jaffrey.

At first I had lent myself to the old dreamer's whim, with a keen perception of the humour of the thing; but by and by I found that I was talking and thinking of Miss Mehetabel's son as though he were a veritable personage. Mr. Jaffrey spoke of the child with such an air of conviction!—as if Andy were playing among his toys in the next room, or making mud-pies down in the yard. In these conversations, it should be observed, the child was never supposed to be present, except on that single occasion when Mr. Jaffrey leaned over the cradle. After one of our *séances* I would lie awake until the small hours thinking of the boy, and then fall asleep only to have indigestible dreams about him. Through the day, and sometimes in the midst of complicated calculations, I would catch myself wondering what Andy was up to now! There was no shaking him off; he became an inseparable nightmare to me; and I felt that if I remained much longer at Bayley's Four-Corners I should turn into just such another

bald-headed, mild-eyed visionary as Silas Jaffrey.

Then the tavern was a gruesome old shell any way, full of unaccountable noises after dark—rustlings of garments along unfrequented passages, and stealthy footfalls in unoccupied chambers overhead. I never knew of an old house without these mysterious noises. Next to my bedroom was a musty, dismantled apartment, in one corner of which, leaning against the wainscot, was a crippled mangle, with its iron crank tilted in the air like the elbow of the late Mr. Clem Jaffrey. Sometimes,

"In the dead vast and middle of the night,"

I used to hear sounds as if some one were turning that rusty crank on the sly. This occurred only on particularly cold nights, and I conceived the uncomfortable idea that it was the thin family ghosts, from the neglected graveyard in the corn-field, keeping themselves warm by running each other through the mangle. There was a haunted air about the whole place that made it easy for me to believe in the existence of a phantasm like Miss Mehetabel's son, who, after all, was less unearthly than Mr. Jaffrey him-

self, and seemed more properly an inhabitant of this globe than the toothless ogre who kept the inn, not to mention the silent Witch of Endor that cooked our meals for us over the bar-room fire.

In spite of the scowls and winks bestowed upon me by Mr. Sewell, who let slip no opportunity to testify his disapprobation of the intimacy, Mr. Jaffrey and I spent all our evenings together—those long autumnal evenings, through the length of which he talked about the boy, laying out his path in life and hedging the path with roses. He should be sent to the High School at Portsmouth, and then to college; he should be educated like a gentleman, Andy.

"When the old man dies," remarked Mr. Jaffrey one night, rubbing his hands gleefully, as if it were a great joke, "Andy will find that the old man has left him a pretty plum."

"What do you think of having Andy enter West Point, when he's old enough?" said Mr. Jaffrey on another occasion. "He needn't necessarily go into the army when he graduates; he can become a civil engineer."

This was a stroke of flattery so delicate

and indirect that I could accept it without immodesty.

There had lately sprung up on the corner of Mr. Jaffrey's bureau a small tin house, Gothic in architecture and pink in colour, with a slit in the roof, and the word BANK painted on one façade. Several times in the course of an evening Mr. Jaffrey would rise from his chair without interrupting the conversation, and gravely drop a nickel into the scuttle of the bank. It was pleasant to observe the solemnity of his countenance as he approached the edifice, and the air of triumph with which he resumed his seat by the fireplace. One night I missed the tin bank. It had disappeared, deposits and all, like a real bank. Evidently there had been a defalcation on rather a large scale. I strongly suspected that Mr. Sewell was at the bottom of it, but my suspicion was not shared by Mr. Jaffrey, who, remarking my glance at the bureau, became suddenly depressed. "I 'm afraid," he said, "that I have failed to instil into Andrew those principles of integrity which—which"—and the old gentleman quite broke down.

Andy was now eight or nine years old, and for some time past, if the truth must be

told, had given Mr. Jaffrey no inconsiderable trouble; what with his impishness and his illnesses, the boy led the pair of us a lively dance. I shall not soon forget the anxiety of Mr. Jaffrey the night Andy had the scarlet-fever—an anxiety which so infected me, that I actually returned to the tavern the following afternoon earlier than usual, dreading to hear that the little spectre was dead, and greatly relieved on meeting Mr. Jaffrey at the door-step with his face wreathed in smiles. When I spoke to him of Andy, I was made aware that I was inquiring into a case of scarlet-fever that had occurred the year before!

It was at this time, towards the end of my second week at Greenton, that I noticed what was probably not a new trait—Mr. Jaffrey's curious sensitiveness to atmospherical changes. He was as sensitive as a barometer. The approach of a storm sent his mercury down instantly. When the weather was fair, he was hopeful and sunny, and Andy's prospects were brilliant. When the weather was overcast and threatening, he grew restless and despondent, and was afraid that the boy was not going to turn out well.

On the Saturday previous to my departure,

which had been fixed for Monday, it rained heavily all the afternoon, and that night Mr. Jaffrey was in an unusually excitable and unhappy frame of mind. His mercury was very low indeed.

"That boy is going to the dogs just as fast as he can go," said Mr. Jaffrey, with a woful face. "I can't do anything with him."

"He 'll come out all right, Mr. Jaffrey. Boys will be boys. I would not give a snap for a lad without animal spirits."

"But animal spirits," said Mr. Jaffrey sententiously, "shouldn't saw off the legs of the piano in Tobias's best parlour. I don't know what Tobias will say when he finds it out."

"What! has Andy sawed off the legs of the old spinet?" I returned, laughing.

"Worse than that."

"Played upon it, then!"

"No, sir. He has lied to me!"

"I can't believe that of Andy."

"Lied to me, sir," repeated Mr. Jaffrey severely. "He pledged me his word of honour that he would give over his climbing. The way that boy climbs sends a chill down my spine. This morning, notwithstanding

his solemn promise, he shinned up the lightning-rod attached to the extension, and sat astride the ridge-pole. I saw him, and he denied it! When a boy you have caressed and indulged and lavished pocket-money on lies to you and *will* climb, then there's nothing more to be said. He's a lost child."

"You take too dark a view of it, Mr. Jaffrey. Training and education are bound to tell in the end, and he has been well brought up."

"But I didn't bring him up on a lightning-rod, did I? If he is ever going to know how to behave, he ought to know now. To-morrow he will be eleven years old."

The reflection came to me that if Andy had not been brought up by the rod, he had certainly been brought up by the lightning. He was eleven years old in two weeks!

I essayed, with that perspicacious wisdom which seems to be the peculiar property of bachelors and elderly maiden ladies, to tranquillise Mr. Jaffrey's mind, and to give him some practical hints on the management of youth.

"Spank him," I suggested at last.

"I will!" said the old gentleman.

"And you'd better do it at once!" I added, as it flashed upon me that in six months Andy would be a hundred and forty-three years old!—an age at which parental discipline would have to be relaxed.

The next morning, Sunday, the rain came down as if determined to drive the quicksilver entirely out of my poor friend. Mr. Jaffrey sat bolt upright at the breakfast-table, looking as wobegone as a bust of Dante, and retired to his chamber the moment the meal was finished. As the day advanced the wind veered round to the north-east, and settled itself down to work. It was not pleasant to think, and I tried not to think, what Mr. Jaffrey's condition would be if the weather did not mend its manners by noon; but so far from clearing off at noon, the storm increased in violence, and as night set in the wind whistled in a spiteful falsetto key, and the rain lashed the old tavern as if it were a balky horse that refused to move on. The windows rattled in the worm-eaten frames, and the doors of remote rooms, where nobody ever went, slammed to in the maddest way. Now and then the tornado, sweeping down the side of Mount Agamenticus, bowled across the

open country, and struck the ancient hostelry point-blank.

Mr. Jaffrey did not appear at supper. I knew that he was expecting me to come to his room as usual, and I turned over in my mind a dozen plans to evade seeing him that night. The landlord sat at the opposite side of the chimney-place, with his eye upon me. I fancy he was aware of the effect of this storm on his other boarder, for at intervals, as the wind hurled itself against the exposed gable, threatening to burst in the windows, Mr. Sewell tipped me an atrocious wink, and displayed his gums in a way he had not done since the morning after my arrival at Greenton. I wondered if he suspected anything about Andy. There had been odd times during the past week when I felt convinced that the existence of Miss Mehetabel's son was no secret to Mr. Sewell.

In deference to the gale, the landlord sat up half an hour later than was his custom. At half-past eight he went to bed, remarking that he thought the old pile would stand till morning.

He had been absent only a few minutes when I heard a rustling at the door. I looked up, and beheld Mr. Jaffrey standing

on the threshold, with his dress in disorder, his scant hair flying, and the wildest expression on his face.

"He 's gone :" cried Mr. Jaffrey.

"Who? Sewell? Yes, he just went to bed."

"No, not Tobias—the boy !"

"What, run away ?"

"No—he is dead ! He has fallen from a step-ladder in the red chamber and broken his neck !"

Mr. Jaffrey threw up his hands with a gesture of despair, and disappeared. I followed him through the hall, saw him go into his own apartment, and heard the bolt of the door drawn to. Then I returned to the bar-room, and sat for an hour or two in the ruddy glow of the fire, brooding over the strange experience of the last fortnight.

On my way to bed I paused at Mr. Jaffrey's door, and, in a lull of the storm, the measured respiration within told me that the old gentleman was sleeping peacefully.

Slumber was coy with me that night. I lay listening to the soughing of the wind, and thinking of Mr. Jaffrey's illusion. It had amused me at first with its grotesque-

ness ; but now the poor little phantom was dead, I was conscious that there had been something pathetic in it all along. Shortly after midnight the wind sunk down, coming and going fainter and fainter, floating around the eaves of the tavern with an undulating, murmurous sound, as if it were turning itself into soft wings to bear away the spirit of a little child.

Perhaps nothing that happened during my stay at Bayley's Four-Corners took me so completely by surprise as Mr. Jaffrey's radiant countenance the next morning. The morning itself was not fresher or sunnier. His round face literally shone with geniality and happiness. His eyes twinkled like diamonds, and the magnetic light of his hair was turned on full. He came into my room while I was packing my valise. He chirped, and prattled, and carolled, and was sorry I was going away—but never a word about Andy. However, the boy had probably been dead several years then !

The open wagon that was to carry me to the station stood at the door ; Mr. Sewell was placing my case of instruments under the seat, and Mr. Jaffrey had gone up to his room to get me a certain newspaper con-

taining an account of a remarkable shipwreck on the Auckland Islands. I took the opportunity to thank Mr. Sewell for his courtesies to me, and to express my regret at leaving him and Mr. Jaffrey.

"I have become very much attached to Mr. Jaffrey," I said; "he is a most interesting person; but that hypothetical boy of his, that son of Miss Mehetabel's——"

"Yes, I know!" interrupted Mr. Sewell testily. "Fell off a step-ladder and broke his dratted neck. Eleven year old, wasn't he? Always does, jest at that point. Next week Silas will begin the whole thing over again, if he can get anybody to listen to him."

"I see. Our amiable friend is a little queer on that subject."

Mr. Sewell glanced cautiously over his shoulder, and, tapping himself significantly on the forehead, said in a low voice—

"Room To Let—Unfurnished!"

OUR NEW NEIGHBOURS AT PONKAPOG.

OUR NEW NEIGHBOURS AT PONKAPOG.

WHEN I saw the little house building, an eighth of a mile beyond my own, on the Old Bay Road, I wondered who were to be the tenants. The modest structure was set well back from the road, among the trees, as if the inmates were to care nothing whatever for a view of the stylish equipages which sweep by during the summer season. For my part, I like to see the passing, in town or country; but each has his own unaccountable taste. The proprietor, who seemed to be also the architect of the new house, superintended the various details of the work with an assiduity that gave me a high opinion of his intelligence and executive ability, and I congratulated myself on the prospect of having some very agreeable neighbours.

It was quite early in the spring, if I remember, when they moved into the cottage

—a newly married couple, evidently: the wife very young, pretty, and with the air of a lady; the husband somewhat older, but still in the first flush of manhood. It was understood in the village that they came from Baltimore; but no one knew them personally, and they brought no letters of introduction. (For obvious reasons I refrain from mentioning names.) It was clear that, for the present at least, their own company was entirely sufficient for them. They made no advances toward the acquaintance of any of the families in the neighbourhood, and consequently were left to themselves. That, apparently, was what they desired, and why they came to Ponkapog. For after its black bass and wild duck and teal, solitude is the chief staple of Ponkapog. Perhaps its perfect rural loveliness should be included. Lying high up under the wing of the Blue Hills, and in the odorous breath of pines and cedars, it chances to be the most enchanting bit of unlaced dishevelled country within fifty miles of Boston, which, moreover, can be reached in half an hour's ride by railway. But the nearest railway station (Heaven be praised!) is two miles distant, and the seclusion is without a flaw.

Ponkapog has one mail a day; two mails a day would render the place uninhabitable.

The village—it looks like a compact village at a distance, but unravels and disappears the moment you drive into it—has quite a large floating population. I do not allude to the perch and pickerel in Ponkapog Pond. Along the Old Bay Road, a highway even in the colonial days, there are a number of attractive villas and cottages straggling off towards Milton, which are occupied for the summer by people from the city. These birds of passage are a distinct class from the permanent inhabitants, and the two seldom closely assimilate unless there has been some previous connection. It seemed to me that our new neighbours were to come under the head of permanent inhabitants; they had built their own house, and had the air of intending to live in it all the year round.

"Are you not going to call on them?" I asked my wife one morning.

"When they call on *us*," she replied lightly.

"But it is our place to call first, they being strangers."

This was said as seriously as the circum-

stance demanded ; but my wife turned it off with a laugh, and I said no more, always trusting to her intuitions in these matters.

She was right. She would not have been received, and a cool "Not at home" would have been a bitter social pill to us if we had gone out of our way to be courteous.

I saw a great deal of our neighbours, nevertheless. Their cottage lay between us and the post-office—where *he* was never to be met with by any chance—and I caught frequent glimpses of the two working in the garden. Floriculture did not appear so much an object as exercise. Possibly it was neither ; may be they were engaged in digging for specimens of those arrowheads and flint hatchets which are continually coming to the surface hereabouts. There is scarcely an acre in which the ploughshare has not turned up some primitive stone weapon or domestic utensil, disdainfully left to us by the red men who once held this domain—an ancient tribe called the Punkypoags, a forlorn descendant of which, one Polly Crowd, figures in the annual Blue Book, down to the close of the Southern war, as a State pensioner. At that period she appears to have struck a trail to the Happy Hunting

Grounds. I quote from the local historiographer.

Whether they were developing a kitchen-garden, or emulating Professor Schliemann at Mycenæ, the new-comers were evidently persons of refined musical taste: the lady had a contralto voice of remarkable sweetness, although of no great compass, and I used often to linger of a morning by the high gate and listen to her executing an arietta, conjecturally at some window upstairs, for the house was not visible from the turnpike. The husband, somewhere about the grounds, would occasionally respond with two or three bars. It was all quite an ideal, Arcadian business. They seemed very happy together, these two persons, who asked no odds whatever of the community in which they had settled themselves.

There was a queerness, a sort of mystery, about this couple which I admit piqued my curiosity, though as a rule I have no morbid interest in the affairs of my neighbours. They behaved like a pair of lovers who had run off and got married clandestinely. I willingly acquitted them, however, of having done anything unlawful; for, to change a word in the lines of the poet,

"It is a joy to *think* the best
We may of humankind."

Admitting the hypothesis of elopement, there was no mystery in their neither sending nor receiving letters. But where did they get their groceries? I do not mean the money to pay for them—that is an enigma apart—but the groceries themselves. No express wagon, no butcher's cart, no vehicle of any description was ever observed to stop at their domicile. Yet they did not order family stores at the sole establishment in the village—an inexhaustible little bottle of a shop which, I advertise it gratis, can turn out anything in the way of groceries from a handsaw to a pocket-handkerchief. I confess that I allowed this unimportant detail of their *ménage* to occupy more of my speculation than was creditable to me.

In several respects our neighbours reminded me of those inexplicable persons we sometimes come across in great cities, though seldom or never in suburban places, where the field may be supposed too restricted for their operations—persons who have no perceptible means of subsistence, and manage to live royally on nothing a year. They hold no Government bonds, they possess no real

estate (our neighbours did own their house), they toil not, neither do they spin ; yet they reap all the numerous soft advantages that usually result from honest toil and skilful spinning. How do they do it? But this is a digression, and I am quite of the opinion of the old lady in *David Copperfield*, who says, "Let us have no meandering!"

Though my wife had declined to risk a ceremonious call on our neighbours as a family, I saw no reason why I should not speak to the husband as an individual when I happened to encounter him by the wayside. I made several approaches to do so, when it occurred to my penetration that my neighbour had the air of trying to avoid me. I resolved to put the suspicion to the test, and one forenoon, when he was sauntering along on the opposite side of the road, in the vicinity of Fisher's sawmill, I deliberately crossed over to address him. The brusque manner in which he hurried away was not to be misunderstood. Of course I was not going to force myself upon him.

It was at this time that I began to formulate uncharitable suppositions touching our neighbours, and would have been as well pleased if some of my choicest fruit-trees

had not overhung their wall. I determined to keep my eyes open later in the season, when the fruit should be ripe to pluck. In some folks, a sense of the delicate shades of difference between *meum* and *tuum* does not seem to be very strongly developed in the Moon of Cherries, to use the old Indian phrase.

I was sufficiently magnanimous not to impart any of these sinister impressions to the families with whom we were on visiting terms; for I despise a gossip. I would say nothing against the persons up the road until I had something definite to say. My interest in them was—well, not exactly extinguished, but burning low. I met the gentleman at intervals, and passed him without recognition; at rarer intervals I saw the lady.

After a while I not only missed my occasional glimpses of her pretty, slim figure, always draped in some soft black stuff with a bit of scarlet at the throat, but I inferred that she did not go about the house singing in her light-hearted manner as formerly. What had happened? Had the honeymoon suffered eclipse already? Was she ill? I fancied she was ill, and that I detected a

certain anxiety in the husband, who spent the mornings digging solitarily in the garden, and seemed to have relinquished those long jaunts to the brow of Blue Hill, where there is a superb view of all Norfolk County combined with sundry venerable rattlesnakes with twelve rattles.

As the days went by it became certain that the lady was confined to the house, perhaps seriously ill, possibly a confirmed invalid. Whether she was attended by a physician from Canton or from Milton, I was unable to say ; but neither the gig with the large white allopathic horse, nor the gig with the homœopathic sorrel mare, was ever seen hitched at the gate during the day. If a physician had charge of the case, he visited his patient only at night. All this moved my sympathy, and I reproached myself with having had hard thoughts of our neighbours. Trouble had come to them early. I would have liked to offer them such small, friendly services as lay in my power; but the memory of the repulse I had sustained still rankled in me. So I hesitated.

One morning my two boys burst into the library with their eyes sparkling.

"You know the old elm down the road?" cried one.

"Yes."

"The elm with the hang-bird's nest?" shrieked the other.

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, we both just climbed up, and there 's three young ones in it!"

Then I smiled to think that our new neighbours had got such a promising little family.

A MIDNIGHT FANTASY.

I.

IT was close upon eleven o'clock when I stepped out of the rear vestibule of the Boston Theatre, and, passing through the narrow court that leads to West Street, struck across the Common diagonally. Indeed, as I set foot on the Tremont Street mall, I heard the Old South drowsily sounding the hour.

It was a tranquil June night, with no moon, but clusters of sensitive stars that seemed to shiver with cold as the wind swept by them; for perhaps there was a swift current of air up there in the zenith. However, not a leaf stirred on the Common; the foliage hung black and massive, as if cut in bronze: even the gaslights appeared to be infected by the prevailing calm, burning steadily behind their glass screens and turning the neighbouring leaves into the tenderest emerald. Here and there, in the sombre row of houses stretching along Beacon

Street, an illuminated window gilded a few square feet of darkness; and now and then a footfall sounded on a distant pavement. The pulse of the city throbbed languidly.

The lights far and near, the fantastic shadows of the elms and maples, the gathering dew, the elusive odour of new grass, and that peculiar hush which belongs only to midnight—as if Time had paused in his flight and were holding his breath—gave to the place, so familiar to me by day, an air of indescribable strangeness and remoteness. The vast, deserted park had lost all its wonted outlines; I walked doubtfully on the flagstones which I had many a time helped to wear smooth; I seemed to be wandering in some lonely unknown garden across the seas—in that old garden in Verona where Shakespeare's ill-starred lovers met and parted. The white granite façade over yonder—the Somerset Club—might well have been the house of Capulet; there was the clambering vine reaching up like a pliant silken ladder; there, near by, was the low-hung balcony, wanting only the slight girlish figure—immortal shape of fire and dew!—to make the illusion perfect.

I do not know what suggested it; perhaps

it was something in the play I had just witnessed—it is not always easy to put one's finger on the invisible electric thread that runs from thought to thought—but as I sauntered on I fell to thinking of the ill-assorted marriages I had known. Suddenly there hurried along the gravelled path which crossed mine obliquely a half-indistinguishable throng of pathetic men and women: two by two they filed before me, each becoming startlingly distinct for an instant as they passed—some with tears, some with hollow smiles, and some with firm-set lips, bearing their fetters with them. There was little Alice chained to old Bowlsby; there was Lucille, "a daughter of the gods, divinely tall," linked for ever to the dwarf Perrywinkle; there was my friend Porphyro, the poet, with his delicate genius shrivelled in the glare of the youngest Miss Lucifer's eyes; there they were, Beauty and the Beast, Pride and Humility, Bluebeard and Fatima, Prose and Poetry, Riches and Poverty, Youth and Crabbed Age—oh, sorrowful procession! All so wretched, when perhaps all might have been so happy if they had only paired differently!

I halted a moment to let the weird shapes

drift by. As the last of the train melted into the darkness, my vagabond fancy went wandering back to the theatre and the play I had seen—Romeo and Juliet. Taking a lighter tint, but still of the same sober colour, my reflections continued.

What a different kind of woman Juliet would have been if she had not fallen in love with Romeo, but had bestowed her affection on some thoughtful and stately signior —on one of the Della Scalas, for example! What Juliet needed was a firm and gentle hand to tame her high spirit without breaking a pinion. She was a little too—vivacious, you might say—"gushing" would perhaps be the word if you were speaking of a modern maiden with so exuberant a disposition as Juliet's. She was too romantic, too blossomy, too impetuous, too wilful; old Capulet had brought her up injudiciously, and Lady Capulet was a nonentity. Yet in spite of faults of training, and some slight inherent flaws of character, Juliet was a superb creature; there was a fascinating dash in her frankness; her modesty and daring were as happy rhymes as ever touched lips in a love-poem. But her impulses required curbing; her heart made

too many beats to the minute. It was an evil destiny that flung in the path of so rich and passionate a nature a fire-brand like Romeo. Even if no family feud had existed, the match would not have been a wise one. As it was, the well-known result was inevitable. What could come of it but clandestine meetings, secret marriage, flight, despair, poison, and the Tomb of the Capulets?

I had left the park behind, by this, and had entered a thoroughfare where the street lamps were closer together; but the gloom of the trees seemed still to be overhanging me. The fact is, the tragedy had laid a black finger on my imagination. I wished that the play had ended a trifle more cheerfully. I wished—possibly because I see enough tragedy all around me without going to the theatre for it, or possibly it was because the lady who enacted the leading part was a remarkably clean-cut little person, with a golden sweep of eyelashes—I wished that Juliet could have had a more comfortable time of it. Instead of a yawning sepulchre, with Romeo and Juliet dying in the middle foreground, and that luckless young Paris stretched out on the left, spitted like

a spring chicken with Montague's rapier, and Friar Laurence, with a dark lantern, groping about under the melancholy yews —in place of all this costly piled-up woe, I would have liked a pretty, mediæval chapel scene, with illuminated stained-glass windows, and trim acolytes holding lighted candles, and the great green curtain slowly descending to the first few bars of the Wedding March of Mendelssohn.

Of course Shakespeare was true to the life in making them all die miserably. Besides, it was so they died in the novel of Matteo Bandello, from which the poet indirectly took his plot. Under the circumstances no other climax was practicable; and yet it was sad business. There were Mercutio, and Tybalt, and Paris, and Juliet, and Romeo, come to a bloody end in the bloom of their youth and strength and beauty.

The ghosts of these five murdered persons seemed to be on my track as I hurried down Revere Street to West Cedar. I fancied them hovering around the corner opposite the small drug-store, where a meagre apothecary was in the act of shutting up the fan-like jets of gas in his shop window.

"No, Master Booth," I muttered in the

imagined teeth of the tragedian, throwing an involuntary glance over my shoulder, "you 'll not catch me assisting at any more of your Shakespearean revivals. I would rather eat a pair of Welsh rarebits or a segment of mince-pie at midnight than sit through the finest tragedy that was ever writ."

As I said this I halted at the door of a house in Charles Place, and was fumbling for my latch-key, when a most absurd idea came into my head. I let the key slip back into my pocket, and strode down Charles Place into Cambridge Street, and across the long bridge, and then swiftly forward.

I remember, vaguely, that I paused for a moment on the draw of the bridge, to look at the semicircular fringe of lights duplicating itself in the smooth Charles in the rear of Beacon Street—as lovely a bit of Venetian effect as you will get outside of Venice; I remember meeting, further on, near a stiff wooden church in Cambridgeport, a lumbering covered wagon, evidently from Brighton and bound for Quincy Market; and still further on, somewhere in the vicinity of Harvard Square and the college buildings, I recollect catching a glimpse of a policeman,

who, probably observing something suspicious in my demeanour, discreetly walked off in an opposite direction. I recall these trifles indistinctly, for during this preposterous excursion I was at no time sharply conscious of my surroundings; the material world presented itself to me as if through a piece of stained glass. It was only when I had reached a neighbourhood where the houses were few and the gardens many, a neighbourhood where the closely-knitted town began to fringe out into the country, that I came to the end of my dream. And what was the dream? The slightest of tissues, madam; a gossamer, a web of shadows, a thing woven out of starlight. Looking at it by day, I find that its colours are pallid, and its threaded diamonds—they were merely the perishable dews of that June night—have evaporated in the sunshine; but such as it is you shall have it.

II.

THE young Prince Hamlet was not happy at Elsinore. It was not because he missed the gay student-life of Wittenberg, and that the little Danish court was intolerably dull. It was not because the didactic lord chamberlain bored him with long speeches, or that the lord chamberlain's daughter was become a shade wearisome. Hamlet had more serious cues for unhappiness. He had been summoned suddenly from Wittenberg to attend his father's funeral ; close upon this, and while his grief was green, his mother had married with his uncle Claudius, whom Hamlet had never liked.

The indecorous haste of these nuptials—they took place within two months after the king's death, the funeral-baked meats, as Hamlet cursorily remarked, furnishing forth the marriage-tables—struck the young prince aghast. He had loved the queen his mother, and nearly idolised the late king ; but now

he forgot to lament the death of the one in contemplating the life of the other. The billing and cooing of the newly married couple filled him with horror. Anger, shame, pity, and despair seized upon him by turns. He fell into a forlorn condition, forsaking his books, eating little save of the chameleon's dish, the air, drinking deep of Rhenish, letting his long, black locks go unkempt, and neglecting his dress—he who had hitherto been "the glass of fashion and the mould of form," as Ophelia had prettily said of him.

Often for half the night he would wander along the ramparts of the castle, at the imminent risk of tumbling off, gazing seaward and muttering strangely to himself, and evolving frightful spectres out of the shadows cast by the turrets. Sometimes he lapsed into a gentle melancholy; but not seldom his mood was ferocious, and at such times the conversational Polonius, with a discretion that did him credit, steered clear of my lord Hamlet.

He turned no more graceful compliments for Ophelia. The thought of marrying her, if he had ever seriously thought of it, was gone now. He rather ruthlessly advised her

to go into a nunnery. His mother had sickened him of women. It was of her he spoke the notable words, "Frailty, thy name is woman!" which, some time afterwards, an amiable French gentleman had neatly engraved on the headstone of his wife, who had long been an invalid. Even the king and queen did not escape Hamlet in his distempered moments. Passing his mother in a corridor or on a staircase of the palace, he would suddenly plant a verbal dagger in her heart; and frequently, in full court, he would deal the king such a cutting reply as caused him to blanch, and gnaw his lip.

If the spectacle of Gertrude and Claudius was hateful to Hamlet, the presence of Hamlet, on the other hand, was scarcely a comfort to the royal lovers. At first his uncle had called him "our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son," trying to smooth over matters; but Hamlet would have none of it. Therefore, one day, when the young prince abruptly announced his intention to go abroad, neither the king nor the queen placed impediments in his way, though, some months previously, they had both protested strongly against his returning to Wittenberg.

The small-fry of the court knew nothing of Prince Hamlet's determination until he had sailed from Elsinore; their knowledge then was confined to the fact of his departure. It was only to Horatio, his fellow-student and friend, that Hamlet confided the real cause of his self-imposed exile, though perhaps Ophelia half suspected it.

Polonius had dropped an early hint to his daughter concerning Hamlet's intent. She knew that everything was over between them, and the night before he embarked Ophelia placed in the prince's hand the few letters and trinkets he had given her, repeating, as she did so, a certain distich which somehow haunted Hamlet's memory for several days after he was on shipboard—

"Take these again; for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind."

"These could never have waxed poor," said Hamlet softly to himself, as he leaned over the taffrail, the third day out, spreading the trinkets in his palm, "being originally of but little worth. I fancy that that allusion to 'rich gifts' was a trifle malicious on the part of the fair Ophelia;" and he quietly dropped them into the sea.

It was as a Danish gentleman voyaging for pleasure, and for mental profit also, if that should happen, that Hamlet set forth on his travels. Settled destination he had none, his sole plan being to get clear of Denmark as speedily as possible, and then to drift whither his fancy took him. His fancy naturally took him southward, as it would have taken him northward if he had been a Southron. Many a time while climbing the bleak crags around Elsinore he had thought of the land of the citron and the palm; lying on his couch at night, and listening to the wind as it howled along the machicolated battlements of the castle, his dreams had turned from the cold, blonde ladies of his father's court to the warmer beauties that ripen under sunny skies. He was free now to test the visions of his boyhood. So it chanced, after various wanderings, all tending imperceptibly in one direction, that Hamlet bent his steps towards Italy.

In those rude days one did not accomplish a long journey without having wonderful adventures befall, or encountering divers perils by the way. It was a period when a stout blade on the thigh was a most excel-

lent travelling companion. Hamlet, though of a philosophical complexion, was not slower than another man to scent an affront; he excelled at feats of arms, and no doubt his skill, caught of the old fencing-master at Elsinore, stood him in good stead more than once when his wit would not have saved him. Certainly, he had hairbreadth escapes while toiling through the wilds of Prussia and Bavaria and Switzerland. At all events, he counted himself fortunate the night he arrived at Verona with nothing more serious than a two-inch scratch on his sword arm.

There he lodged himself, as became a gentleman of fortune, in a suite of chambers in a comfortable palace overlooking the swift-flowing Adige — a riotous yellow stream that cut the town into two parts, and was spanned here and there by rough-hewn stone bridges, which it sometimes sportively washed away. It was a brave old town, that had stood sieges and plagues, and was full of mouldy, picturesque buildings and a gaiety that has since grown somewhat mouldy. A goodly place to rest in for the wayworn pilgrim! He dimly recollected that he had letters to one or two illustrious

families; but he cared not to deliver them at once. It was pleasant to stroll about the city, unknown. There were sights to see: the Roman amphitheatre, and the churches with their sculptured sarcophagi and saintly relics—interesting joints and saddles of martyrs, and enough fragments of the true cross to build a ship. The life in the *piazze* and on the streets, the crowds in the shops, the pageants, the lights, the stir, the colour, all mightily took the eye of the young Dane. He was in a mood to be amused. Everything diverted him—the faint pulsing of a guitar-string in adjacent garden at midnight, or the sharp clash of gleaming sword blades under his window, when the Montecchi and the Cappelletti chanced to encounter each other in the narrow footway.

Meanwhile, Hamlet brushed up his Italian. He was well versed in the literature of the language, particularly in its dramatic literature, and had long meditated penning a gloss to "The Murther of Gonzago," a play which Hamlet held in deservedly high estimation.

He made acquaintances, too. In the same palace where he sojourned lived a very valiant soldier and wit, a kinsman to

Prince Escalus, one Mercutio by name, with whom Hamlet exchanged civilities on the staircase at first, and then fell into companionship. A number of Verona's noble youths, poets and light-hearted men-about-town, frequented Mercutio's chambers, and with these Hamlet soon became on terms.

Among the rest were an agreeable gentleman, with hazel eyes, named Benvolio, and a gallant young fellow called Romeo, whom Mercutio bantered pitilessly and loved heartily. This Romeo, who belonged to one of the first families, was a very susceptible spark, which the slightest breath of a pretty woman was sufficient to blow into flame. To change the metaphor, he fell from one love affair into another as easily and logically as a ripe pomegranate drops from a bough. He was generally unlucky in these matters, curiously enough, for he was a handsome youth in his saffron satin doublet slashed with black, and his jaunty velvet bonnet with its trailing plume of ostrich feather.

At the time of Hamlet's coming to Verona, Romeo was in a great despair of love in consequence of an unrequited passion for a certain lady of the city, between whose family

and his own a deadly feud had existed for centuries. Somebody had stepped on somebody else's lapdog in the far ages, and the two families had been slashing and hacking at each other ever since. It appeared that Romeo had scaled a garden wall one night, and broken upon the meditations of his inamorata, who, as chance would have it, was sitting on her balcony enjoying the moonrise. No lady could be insensible to such devotion, for it would have been death to Romeo if any of her kinsmen had found him in that particular locality. Some tender phrases passed between them, perhaps ; but the lady was flurried, taken unawares, and afterwards, it seemed, altered her mind, and would have no further commerce with the Montague. This business furnished Mercutio's quiver with innumerable sly shafts, which Romeo received for the most part in good-humour.

With these three gentlemen—Mercutio, Benvolio, and Romeo—Hamlet saw life in Verona, as young men will see life wherever they happen to be. Many a time the nightingale ceased singing and the lark began before they were abed ; but perhaps it is not wise to inquire too closely into this. A

month had slipped away since Hamlet's arrival; the hyacinths were opening in the gardens, and it was spring.

One morning, as he and Mercutio were lounging arm in arm on a bridge near their lodgings, they met a knave in livery puzzling over a parchment which he was plainly unable to decipher.

"Read it aloud, friend!" cried Mercutio, who always had a word to throw away.

"I would I could read it at all. I pray, sir, can you read?"

"With ease—if it is not my tailor's score;" and Mercutio took the parchment, which ran as follows:—

"*Signior Martino, and his wife and daughters; County Anselmo, and his beauteous sisters; the lady widow Vitruvio; Signior Placentio, and his lovely nieces; Mercutio, and his brother Valentine; mine uncle Capulet, his wife and daughters; my fair niece Rosaline; Livia; Signior Valentio, and his cousin Tybalt; Lucio, and the lively Helena.*"

"A very select company, with the exception of that rogue Mercutio," said the soldier, laughing. "What does it mean?"

"My master, the Signior Capulet, gives a

ball and supper to-night; these the guests; I am his man Peter, and if you be not one of the house of Montague, I pray come and crush a cup of wine with us. Rest you merry;" and the knave, having got his billet deciphered for him, made off.

"One must needs go, being asked by both man and master; but since I am asked doubly, I'll not go singly; I'll bring you with me, Hamlet. It is a masquerade; I have had wind of it. The flower of the city will be there—all the high-bosomed roses and low necked lilies."

Hamlet had seen nothing of society in Verona, properly speaking, and did not require much urging to assent to Mercutio's proposal, far from foreseeing that so slight a freak would have a fateful sequence.

It was late in the night when they presented themselves, in mask and domino, at the Capulet mansion. The music was at its sweetest and the torches were at their brightest, as the pair entered the dancing-hall. They had scarcely crossed the threshold when Hamlet's eyes rested upon a lady clad in a white silk robe, who held to her features, as she moved through the figure of the dance, a white satin mask, on each side

of which was disclosed so much of the rosy oval of her face as made one long to look upon the rest. The ornaments this lady wore were pearls ; her fan and slippers, like the robe and mask, were white—nothing but white. Her eyes shone almost black contrasted with the braids of warm gold hair that glistened through a misty veil of Venetian stuff, which floated about her from time to time and enveloped her, as the blossoms do a tree. Hamlet could think of nothing but the almond-tree that stood in full bloom in the little *cortile* near his lodging. She seemed to him the incarnation of that exquisite spring-time which had touched and awakened all the leaves and buds in the sleepy old gardens around Verona.

"Mercutio ! who is that lady ?"

"The daughter of old Capulet, by her stature."

"And he that dances with her ?"

"Paris a kinsman to Can Grande della Scala."

"Her lover ?"

"One of them."

"She has others ? '

"Enough to make a squadron ; only the blind and aged are exempt."

Here the music ceased and the dancers dispersed. Hamlet followed the lady with his eyes, and, seeing her left alone a moment, approached her. She received him graciously, as a mask receives a mask, and the two fell to talking, as people do who have nothing to say to each other and possess the art of saying it. Presently something in his voice struck on her ear, a new note, an intonation sweet and strange, that made her curious. Who was it? It could not be Valentine, nor Anselmo; he was too tall for Signior Placentio, not stout enough for Lucio; it was not her cousin Tybalt. Could it be that rash Montague who— Would he dare? Here, on the very points of their swords? The stream of maskers ebbed and flowed and surged around them, and the music began again, and Juliet listened and listened.

"Who are you, sir," she cried, at last, "that speak our tongue with feigned accent?"

"A stranger; an idler in Verona, though not a gay one—a black butterfly."

"Our Italian sun will gild your wings for you. Black edged with gilt goes gay."

"I am already not so sad-coloured as I was."

"I would fain see your face, sir; if it match your voice, it needs must be a kindly one."

"I would we could change faces."

"So we shall at supper!"

"And hearts too?"

"Nay, I would not give a merry heart for a sorrowful one; but I will quit my mask, and you yours; yet,"—and she spoke under her breath,—"if you are, as I think, a gentleman of Verona—a Montague—do not unmask."

"I am not of Verona, lady; no one knows me here;" and Hamlet threw back the hood of his domino. Juliet held her mask aside for a moment, and the two stood looking into each other's eyes.

"Lady, we have in faith changed faces, at least as I shall carry yours for ever in my memory."

"And I yours, sir," said Juliet softly, "wishing it looked not so pale and melancholy."

"Hamlet," whispered Mercutio, plucking at his friend's skirt, "the fellow there talking with old Capulet—his wife's nephew, Tybalt, a quarrelsome dog—suspects we are Montagues. Let us get out of this peace-

ably, like soldiers who are too much gentlemen to cause a brawl under a host's roof."

With this Mercutio pushed Hamlet to the door, where they were joined by Benvolio. Juliet, with her eyes fixed upon the retreating maskers, stretched out her hand and grasped the arm of an ancient serving-woman who happened to be passing.

"Quick, good Nurse! go ask his name of yonder gentleman. Nay, not the one in green, dear! but he that hath the black domino and purple mask. What, did I touch your poor rheumatic arm? Ah, go now, sweet Nurse!"

As the Nurse hobbled off querulously on her errand, Juliet murmured to herself an old rhyme she knew—

"If he be marriéd,
My grave is like to be my wedding bed!"

When Hamlet got back to his own chambers he sat on the edge of his couch in a brown study. The silvery moonlight, struggling through the swaying branches of a tree outside the window, drifted doubtfully into the room, and made a parody of that fleecy veil which erewhile had floated about the lissome form of the lovely Capulet.

That he loved her, and must tell her that he loved her, was a foregone conclusion; but how should he contrive to see Juliet again? No one knew him in Verona; he had carefully preserved his incognito; even Mercutio regarded him as simply a young gentleman from Denmark, taking his ease in a foreign city. Presented, by Mercutio, as a rich Danish tourist, the Capulets would receive him courteously, of course; as a visitor, but not as a suitor. It was in another character that he must be presented—his own.

He was pondering what steps he could take to establish his identity, when he remembered the two or three letters which he had stuffed into his wallet on quitting Elsinore. He lighted a taper, and began examining the papers. Among them were the half-dozen billet-doux which Ophelia had returned to him the night before his departure. They were neatly tied together by a length of black ribbon, to which was attached a sprig of rosemary.

"That was just like Ophelia!" muttered the young man, tossing the package into the wallet again; "she was always having cheerful ideas like that."

How long ago seemed the night she had handed him these love-letters, in her demure little way! How misty and remote seemed everything connected with the old life at Elsinore! His father's death, his mother's marriage, his anguish and isolation—they were like things that had befallen somebody else. There was something incredible, too, in his present situation. Was he dreaming? Was he really in Italy, and in love?

He hastily bent forward and picked up a square folded paper lying half concealed under the others.

"How could I have forgotten it!" he exclaimed.

It was a missive addressed, in Horatio's angular hand, to the Signior Capulet of Verona, containing a few lines of introduction from Horatio, whose father had dealings with some of the rich Lombardy merchants, and knew many of the leading families in the city. With this and several epistles, preserved by chance, written to him by Queen Gertrude while he was at the university, Hamlet saw that he would have no difficulty in proving to the Capulets that he was the Prince of Denmark.

At an unseemly hour the next morning

Mercutio was roused from his slumbers by Hamlet, who counted every minute a hundred years until he saw Juliet. Mercutio did not take this interruption too patiently, for the honest humorist was very serious as a sleeper; but his equilibrium was quickly restored by Hamlet's revelation.

The friends were long closeted together, and at the proper, ceremonious hour for visitors they repaired to the house of Capulet, who did not hide his sense of the honour done him by the prince. With scarcely any prelude Hamlet unfolded the motive of his visit, and was listened to with rapt attention by old Capulet, who inwardly blessed his stars that he had not given his daughter's hand to the County Paris, as he was on the point of doing. The ladies were not visible on this occasion; the fatigues of the ball overnight, etc.; but that same evening Hamlet was accorded an interview with Juliet and Lady Capulet, and a few days subsequently all Verona was talking of nothing but the new engagement.

The destructive Tybalt scowled at first, and twirled his fierce moustache, and young Paris took to writing dejected poetry; but they both soon recovered their serenity,

seeing that nobody minded them, and went together arm in arm to pay their respects to Hamlet.

A new life began now for Hamlet. He shed his inky cloak, and came out in a doublet of insolent splendour, looking like a dagger-handle newly gilt. With his funereal gear he appeared to have thrown off something of his sepulchral gloom. It was impossible to be gloomy with Juliet, in whom each day developed some sunny charm unguessed before. Her freshness and coquettish candour were constant surprises. She had had many lovers, and she confessed them to Hamlet in the prettiest way. "Perhaps, my dear," she said to him one evening, with an ineffable smile, "I might have liked young Romeo very well, but the family were so opposed to it from the very first. And then he was so—so demonstrative, don't you know?"

Hamlet had known of Romeo's futile passion, but he had not been aware until then that his betrothed was the heroine of the balcony adventure. On leaving Juliet he went to look up the Montague; not for the purpose of crossing rapiers with him, as another man might have done, but to

compliment him on his unexceptionable taste in admiring so rare a lady.

But Romeo had disappeared in a most unaccountable manner, and his family were in great tribulation concerning him. It was thought that perhaps the unrelenting Rosaline (who had been Juliet's frigid predecessor) had relented, and Montague's man Abram was despatched to seek Romeo at her residence ; but the Lady Rosaline, who was embroidering on her piazza, placidly denied all knowledge of him. It was then feared that he had fallen in one of the customary encounters ; but there had been no fight, and nobody had been killed on either side for nearly twelve hours. Nevertheless, his exit had the appearance of being final. When Hamlet questioned Mercutio, the honest soldier laughed and stroked his blonde moustache.

"The boy has gone off in a heat, I don't know where—to the icy ends of the earth, I believe, to cool himself."

Hamlet regretted that Romeo should have had any feeling in the matter ; but regret was a bitter weed that did not thrive well in the atmosphere in which the fortunate lover was moving. He saw Juliet every

day, and there was not a fleck upon his happiness, unless it was the garrulous Nurse, against whom Hamlet had taken a singular prejudice. He considered her a tiresome old person, not too decent in her discourse at times, and advised Juliet to get rid of her; but the ancient serving-woman had been in the family for years, and it was not quite expedient to discharge her at that late day.

With the subtle penetration of old age the Nurse instantly detected Hamlet's dislike, and returned it heartily.

"Ah, ladybird," she cried one night, "ah, well-a-day! you know not how to choose a man. An I could choose for you, Jule! By God's lady, there 's Signior Mercutio, a brave gentleman, a merry gentleman, and a virtuous, I warrant ye, whose little finger-joint is worth all the body of this blackbird prince, dropping down from Lord knows where to fly off with the sweetest bit of flesh in Verona. Marry, come up!"

But this was only a ripple on the stream that flowed so smoothly. Now and then, indeed, Hamlet felt called upon playfully to chide Juliet for her extravagance of language, as when, for instance, she prayed

that when he died he might be cut out in little stars to deck the face of night. Hamlet objected, under any circumstances, to being cut out in little stars for any illuminating purposes whatsoever. Once she suggested to her lover that he should come to the garden after the family retired, and she would speak with him a moment from the balcony. Now, as there was no obstacle to their seeing each other whenever they pleased, and as Hamlet was of a nice sense of honour, and since his engagement a most exquisite practiser of propriety, he did not encourage Juliet in her thoughtlessness.

"What!" he cried, lifting his finger at her reprovingly, "romantic again!"

This was their nearest approach to a lover's quarrel. The next day Hamlet brought her, as peace-offering, a slender gold flask curiously wrought in niello, which he had had filled with a costly odour at an apothecary's as he came along.

"I never saw so lean a thing as that same culler of simples," said Hamlet, laughing; "a matter of ribs and shanks, a mere skeleton painted black. It is a rare essence, though. He told me its barbaric botanical name, but it escapes me."

"That which we call a rose," said Juliet, holding the perfumery to her nostrils and inclining herself prettily towards him, "would smell as sweet by any other name."

O Youth and Love! O fortunate Time!

There was a banquet almost every night at the Capulets', and the Montagues, up the street, kept their blinds drawn down, and Lady Montague, who had four marriageable, tawny daughters on her hands, was livid with envy at her neighbour's success. She would rather have had two or three Montagues prodded through the body than that the prince should have gone to the rival house.

Happy Prince!

If Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Laertes, and the rest of the dismal people at Elsinore, could have seen him now, they would not have known him. Where were his wan looks and biting speeches? His eyes were no longer filled with mournful speculation. He went in glad apparel, and took the sunshine as his natural inheritance. If he ever fell into moodiness—it was partly constitutional with him—the shadow fled away at the first approach of that "loveliest weight on lightest foot." The

sweet Veronese had nestled in his empty heart, and filled it with music. The ghosts and visions that used to haunt him were laid for ever by Juliet's magic.

Happy Juliet!

Her beauty had taken a new gloss. The bud had grown into a flower, redeeming the promises of the bud. If her heart beat less wildly, it throbbed more strongly. If she had given Hamlet of her superabundance of spirits, he had given her of his wisdom and discretion. She had always been a great favourite in society; but Verona thought her ravishing now. The mantua-makers cut their dresses by her patterns, and when she wore turquoise, garnets went out of style. Instead of the groans and tears, and all those distressing events which might possibly have happened if Juliet had persisted in loving Romeo—listen to her laugh and behold her merry eyes!

Every morning either Peter or Gregory might have been seen going up Hamlet's staircase with a note from Juliet—she had ceased to send the Nurse on discovering her lover's antipathy to that person—and some minutes later either Gregory or Peter might have been observed coming down the stair-

case with a missive from Hamlet. Juliet had detected his gift for verse, and insisted, rather capriciously, on having all his replies in that shape. Hamlet humoured her, though he was often hard put to it; for the Muse is a coy immortal, and will not always come when she is wanted. Sometimes he was forced to fall back upon previous efforts, as when he translated these lines into very choice Italian :—

"Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt Truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love."

To be sure, he had originally composed this quatrain for Ophelia; but what would you have? He had scarcely meant it then; he meant it now; besides, a felicitous rhyme never goes out of fashion. It always fits.

While transcribing the verse his thoughts naturally reverted to Ophelia, for the little poesy was full of a faint scent of the past, like a pressed flower. His conscience did not prick him at all. How fortunate for him and for her that matters had gone no further between them! Predisposed to melancholy, and inheriting a not very strong

mind from her father, Ophelia was a lady who needed cheering up, if ever poor lady did. He, Hamlet, was the last man on the globe with whom she should have had any tender affiliation. If they had wed, they would have caught each other's despondency, and died, like a pair of sick ravens, within a fortnight. What had become of her? Had she gone into a nunnery? He would make her abbess, if he ever returned to Elsinore.

After a month or two of courtship, there being no earthly reason to prolong it, Hamlet and Juliet were privately married in the Franciscan Chapel, Friar Laurence officiating; but there was a grand banquet that night at the Capulets', to which all Verona went. At Hamlet's intercession, the Montagues were courteously asked to this festival. To the amazement of every one the Montagues accepted the invitation and came, and were treated royally, and the long lamentable feud—it would have sorely puzzled either house to explain what it was all about—was at an end. The adherents of the Capulets and the Montagues were forbidden on the spot to bite any more thumbs at each other.

"It will detract from the general gaiety of the town," Mercutio remarked. "Signior Tybalt, my friend, I shall never have the pleasure of running you through the diaphragm ; a cup of wine with you !"

The guests were still at supper in the great pavilion erected in the garden, which was as light as day with the glare of innumerable flambeaux set among the shrubbery. Hamlet and Juliet, with several others, had withdrawn from the tables, and were standing in the doorway of the pavilion, when Hamlet's glance fell upon the familiar form of a young man who stood with one foot on the lower step, holding his plumed bonnet in his hand. His hose and doublet were travel-worn, but his honest face was as fresh as daybreak.

"What ! Horatio "

"The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever."

"Sir, my good friend : I'll change *that* name with you. What brings you to Verona ?"

"I fetch you news, my lord."

"Good news ? Then the king is dead."

"The king lives, but Ophelia is no more."

"Ophelia dead !"

"Not so, my lord; she 's married."

"I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student."

"As I do live, my honoured lord, 'tis true."

"Married, say you?"

"Married to him that sent me hither—a gentleman of winning ways and a most choice conceit, the scion of a noble house here in Verona—one Romeo."

The oddest little expression flitted over Juliet's face. There was never woman yet, even on her bridal day, could forgive a jilted lover marrying.

"Ophelia wed!" murmured the bridegroom.

"Do you know the lady, dear?"

"Excellent well," replied Hamlet, turning to Juliet; "a most estimable young person, the daughter of my father's chamberlain. She is rather given to singing ballads of an elegiac nature," added the prince reflectingly, "but our madcap Romeo will cure her of that. Methinks I see them now——"

"Oh, where, my lord?"

"In my mind's eye, Horatio, surrounded by their little ones—noble youths and

graceful maidens, in whom the impetuosity of the fiery Romeo is tempered by the pensiveness of the fair Ophelia. I shall take it most unkindly of them, love," toying with Juliet's fingers, "if they do not name their first boy Hamlet."

It was just as my lord Hamlet finished speaking that the last horse-car for Boston —providentially belated between Watertown and Mount Auburn — swept round the curve of the track on which I was walking. The amber glow of the car lantern lighted up my figure in the gloom, the driver gave a quick turn on the brake, and the conductor, making a sudden dexterous clutch at the strap over his head, sounded the death-knell of my fantasy as I stepped upon the rear platform.

MADEMOISELLE OLYMPE ZABRISKI.

I.

WE are accustomed to speak with a certain light irony of the tendency which women have to gossip, as if the sin itself, if it is a sin, were of the gentler sex, and could by no chance be a masculine peccadillo. So far as my observation goes, men are as much given to small talk as women, and it is undeniable that we have produced the highest type of gossiper extant. Where will you find, in or out of literature, such another droll, delightful, chatty busybody as Samuel Pepys, Esq., Secretary to the Admiralty in the reigns of those fortunate gentlemen Charles II. and James II. of England? He is the king of tattlers as Shakespeare is the king of poets.

If it came to a matter of pure gossip, I would back Our Club against the Sorosis or any women's club in existence. Whenever you see in our drawing-room four or five young fellows lounging in easy-chairs, cigar

in hand, and now and then bringing their heads together over the small round Japanese table which is always the pivot of these social circles, you may be sure that they are discussing Tom's engagement, or Dick's extravagance, or Harry's hopeless passion for the younger Miss Fleurdelys. It is here old Tippleton gets execrated for that everlasting *bon mot* of his which was quite a success at dinner-parties forty years ago; it is here the belle of the season passes under the scalpels of merciless young surgeons; it is here B's financial condition is handled in a way that would make B's hair stand on end; it is here, in short, that everything is canvassed—everything that happens in our set, I mean, much that never happens, and a great deal that could not possibly happen. It was at Our Club that I learned the particulars of the Van Twiller affair.

It was great entertainment to Our Club, the Van Twiller affair, though it was rather a joyless thing, I fancy, for Van Twiller. To understand the case fully, it should be understood that Ralph Van Twiller is one of the proudest and most sensitive men living. He is a lineal descendant of Wouter

Van Twiller, the famous old Dutch governor of New York—Nieuw Amsterdam, as it was then; his ancestors have always been burgomasters or admirals or generals, and his mother is the Mrs. Vanrensselaer Vanzandt Van Twiller, whose magnificent place will be pointed out to you on the right bank of the Hudson, as you pass up the historic river towards Idlewild. Ralph is about twenty-five years old. Birth made him a gentleman, and the rise of real estate—some of it in the family since the old governor's time—made him a millionaire. It was a kindly fairy that stepped in and made him a good fellow also. Fortune, I take it, was in her most jocund mood when she heaped her gifts in this fashion on Van Twiller, who was, and will be again, when this cloud blows over, the flower of Our Club.

About a year ago there came a whisper—if the word "whisper" is not too harsh a term to apply to what seemed a mere breath floating gently through the atmosphere of the billiard-room—imparting the intelligence that Van Twiller was in some kind of trouble. Just as everybody suddenly takes to wearing square-toed boots, or to drawing

his neckscarf through a ring, so it became all at once the fashion, without any preconcerted agreement, for everybody to speak of Van Twiller as a man in some way under a cloud. But what the cloud was, and how he got under it, and why he did not get away from it, were points that lifted themselves into the realm of pure conjecture. There was no man in the club with strong enough wing to his imagination to soar to the supposition that Van Twiller was embarrassed in money matters. Was he in love? That appeared nearly as improbable; for if he had been in love all the world—that is, perhaps a hundred first families—would have known all about it instantly.

"He has the symptoms," said Delaney, laughing. "I remember once when Jack Flemming——"

"Ned!" cried Flemming, "I protest against any allusion to that business."

This was one night when Van Twiller had wandered into the club, turned over the magazines absently in the reading-room, and wandered out again without speaking ten words. The most careless eye would have remarked the great change that had come over Van Twiller. Now and then he would

play a game of billiards with De Peyster or Haseltine, or stop to chat a moment in the vestibule with old Duane; but he was an altered man. When at the club, he was usually to be found in the small smoking-room upstairs, seated on a fauteuil fast asleep, with the last number of *The Nation* in his hand. Once, if you went to two or three places of an evening, you were certain to meet Van Twiller at them all. You seldom met him in society now.

By and by came whisper number two—a whisper more emphatic than number one, but still untraceable to any tangible mouth-piece. This time the whisper said that Van Twiller *was* in love. But with whom? The list of possible Mrs. Van Twillers was carefully examined by experienced hands, and a check placed against a fine old Knickerbocker name here and there, but nothing satisfactory arrived at. Then that same still small voice of rumour, but now with an easily detected staccato sharpness to it, said that Van Twiller was in love—with an actress! Van Twiller, whom it had taken all these years and all this waste of raw material in the way of ancestors to bring to perfection—Ralph Van Twiller,

the net result and flower of his race, the descendant of Wouter, the son of Mrs. Vanrensselaer Vanzandt Van Twiller—in love with an actress ! That was too ridiculous to be believed—and so everybody believed it.

Six or seven members of the club abruptly discovered in themselves an unsuspected latent passion for the histrionic art. In squads of two or three they stormed successively all the theatres in town—Booth's, Wallack's, Daly's Fifth Avenue (not burnt down then), and the Grand Opera House. Even the shabby homes of the drama over in the Bowery, where the Germanic Thespis has not taken out his naturalisation papers, underwent rigid exploration. But no clue was found to Van Twiller's mysterious attachment. The *opéra bouffe*, which promised the widest field for investigation, produced absolutely nothing, not even a crop of suspicions. One night, after several weeks of this, Delaney and I fancied that we caught sight of Van Twiller in the private box of an up-town theatre, where some thrilling trapeze performance was going on, which we did not care to sit through ; but we concluded afterwards that it was only somebody who looked like him. Delaney, by

the way, was unusually active in this search. I dare say he never quite forgave Van Twiller for calling him Muslin Delaney. Ned is fond of ladies' society, and that 's a fact.

The Cimmerian darkness which surrounded Van Twiller's inamorata left us free to indulge in the wildest conjectures. Whether she was black-tressed Melpomene, with bowl and dagger, or Thalia, with the fair hair and the laughing face, was only to be guessed at. It was popularly conceded, however, that Van Twiller was on the point of forming a dreadful *mésalliance.*

Up to this period he had visited the club regularly. Suddenly he ceased to appear. He was not to be seen on Fifth Avenue, or in the Central Park, or at the houses he generally frequented. His chambers—and mighty comfortable chambers they were—on Thirty-fourth Street were deserted. He had dropped out of the world, shot like a bright particular star from his orbit in the heaven of the best society.

The following conversation took place one night in the smoking-room :—

"Where 's Van Twiller?"

"Who 's seen Van Twiller?"

"What has become of Van Twiller?"

Delaney picked up the *Evening Post*, and read — with a solemnity that betrayed young Firkins into exclaiming, "By Jove, now!"—

"Married, on the 10th instant, by the Rev. Friar Laurence, at the residence of the bride's uncle, Montague Capulet, Esq., Miss Adrienne Le Couvreur to Mr. Ralph Van Twiller, both of this city. No cards."

"Free List suspended," murmured De Peyster.

"It strikes me," said Frank Livingstone, who had been ruffling the leaves of a magazine at the other end of the table, "that you fellows are in a great fever about Van Twiller."

"So we are."

"Well, he has simply gone out of town."

"Where?"

"Up to the old homestead on the Hudson."

"It 's an odd time of year for a fellow to go into the country."

"He has gone to visit his mother," said Livingstone.

"In February?"

"I didn't know, Delaney, that there was any statute in force prohibiting a man from

visiting his mother in February if he wants to."

Delaney made some light remark about the pleasure of communing with Nature with a cold in her head, and the topic was dropped.

Livingstone was hand in glove with Van Twiller, and if any man shared his confidence, it was Livingstone. He was aware of the gossip and speculation that had been rife in the club, but he either was not at liberty or did not think it worth while to relieve our curiosity. In the course of a week or two it was reported that Van Twiller was going to Europe; and go he did. A dozen of us went down to the *Scythia* to see him off. It was refreshing to have something as positive as the fact that Van Twiller had sailed.

II.

SHORTLY after Van Twiller's departure the whole thing came out. Whether Livingstone found the secret too heavy a burden, or whether it transpired through some indiscretion on the part of Mrs. Vanrensselaer Vanzandt Van Twiller, I cannot say, but one evening the entire story was in the possession of the club.

Van Twiller had actually been very deeply interested—not in an actress, for the legitimate drama was not her humble walk in life, but—in Mademoiselle Olympe Zabriski, whose really perilous feats on the trapeze had astonished New York the year before, though they had failed to attract Delaney and me the night we wandered into the uptown theatre on the trail of Van Twiller's mystery.

That a man like Van Twiller should be fascinated, even for an instant, by a common circus-girl seems incredible ; but it is always

the incredible thing that happens. Besides, Mademoiselle Olympe was not a common circus-girl ; she was a most daring and startling gymnaste, with a beauty and a grace of movement that gave to her audacious performance almost an air of prudery. Watching her wondrous dexterity and pliant strength, both exercised without apparent effort, it seemed the most natural proceeding in the world that she should do those unpardonable things. She had a way of melting from one graceful posture into another, like the dissolving figures thrown from a stereopticon. She was a lithe radiant shape out of the Grecian mythology, now poised up there above the gaslights, and now gleaming through the air like a slender gilt arrow.

I am describing Mademoiselle Olympe as she appeared to Van Twiller on the first occasion when he strolled into the theatre where she was performing. To me she was a girl of eighteen or twenty years of age (may be she was much older, for pearl powder and distance keep these people perpetually young), slightly but exquisitely built, with sinews of silver wire ; rather pretty, perhaps, after a manner, but show-

ing plainly the effects of the exhaustive drafts she was making on her physical vitality. Now, Van Twiller was an enthusiast on the subject of calisthenics. "If I had a daughter," Van Twiller used to say, "I wouldn't send her to a boarding-school, or a nunnery; I 'd send her to a gymnasium for the first five years. Our American women have no physique. They are lilies, pallid, pretty — and perishable. You marry an American woman, and what do you marry? A headache. Look at English girls. They are at least roses, and last the season through."

Walking home from the theatre that first night, it flitted through Van Twiller's mind that if he could give this girl's set of nerves and muscles to any one of the two hundred high-bred women he knew, he would marry her on the spot and worship her for ever.

The following evening he went to see Mademoiselle Olympe again. "Olympe Zabriski," he soliloquised, as he sauntered through the lobby—"what a queer name! Olympe is French, and Zabriski is Polish. It is her *nom de guerre*, of course; her real name is probably Sarah Jones. What kind of creature can she be in private life, I

wonder? I wonder if she wears that costume all the time, and if she springs to her meals from a horizontal bar. Of course she rocks the baby to sleep on the trapeze." And Van Twiller went on making comical domestic tableaux of Mademoiselle Zabriski, like the clever satirical dog he was, until the curtain rose.

This was on a Friday. There was a matinée the next day, and he attended that, though he had secured a seat for the usual evening entertainment. Then it became a habit of Van Twiller's to drop into the theatre for half an hour or so every night, to assist at the interlude, in which she appeared. He cared only for her part of the programme, and timed his visits accordingly. It was a surprise to himself when he reflected, one morning, that he had not missed a single performance of Mademoiselle Olympe for nearly two weeks.

"This will never do," said Van Twiller. "Olympe"—he called her Olympe, as if she were an old acquaintance, and so she might have been considered by that time—"is a wonderful creature; but this will never do. Van, my boy, you must reform this altogether."

But half-past nine that night saw him in his accustomed orchestra chair, and so on for another week. A habit leads a man so gently in the beginning that he does not perceive he is led—with what silken threads and down what pleasant avenues it leads him! By and by the soft silk threads become iron chains, and the pleasant avenues Avernus!

Quite a new element had lately entered into Van Twiller's enjoyment of Mademoiselle Olympe's ingenious feats—a vaguely born apprehension that she might slip from that swinging bar; that one of the thin cords supporting it might snap, and let her go headlong from the dizzy height. Now and then, for a terrible instant, he would imagine her lying a glittering, palpitating heap at the foot-lights, with no colour in her lips! Sometimes it seemed as if the girl were tempting this kind of fate. It was a hard, bitter life, and nothing but poverty and sordid misery at home could have driven her to it. What if she should end it all some night, by just unclasping that little hand? It looked so small and white from where Van Twiller sat!

This frightful idea fascinated while it chilled him, and helped to make it nearly

impossible for him to keep away from the theatre. In the beginning his attendance had not interfered with his social duties or pleasures; but now he came to find it distasteful after dinner to do anything but read, or walk the streets aimlessly, until it was time to go to the play. When that was over, he was in no mood to go anywhere but to his rooms. So he dropped away by insensible degrees from his habitual haunts, was missed, and began to be talked about at the club. Catching some intimation of this, he ventured no more in the orchestra stalls, but shrouded himself behind the draperies of the private box in which Delaney and I thought we saw him on one occasion.

Now, I find it very perplexing to explain what Van Twiller was wholly unable to explain to himself. He was not in love with Mademoiselle Olympe. He had no wish to speak to her, or to hear her speak. Nothing could have been easier, and nothing further from his desire, than to know her personally. A Van Twiller personally acquainted with a strolling female acrobat! Good heavens! That was something possible only with the discovery of perpetual motion. Taken from her theatrical setting, from her lofty perch,

so to say, on the trapeze bar, Olympe Zabriski would have shocked every aristocratic fibre in Van Twiller's body. He was simply fascinated by her marvellous grace and *élan*, and the magnetic recklessness of the girl. It was very young in him and very weak, and no member of the Sorosis, or all the Sorosisters together, could have been more severe on Van Twiller than he was on himself. To be weak, and to know it, is something of a punishment for a proud man. Van Twiller took his punishment, and went to the theatre, regularly.

"When her engagement comes to an end," he meditated, "that will finish the business."

Mademoiselle Olympe's engagement finally did come to an end, and she departed. But her engagement had been highly beneficial to the treasury-chest of the up-town theatre, and before Van Twiller could get over missing her she had returned from a short Western tour, and her immediate reappearance was underlined on the play-bills.

On a dead wall opposite the windows of Van Twiller's sleeping-room there appeared, as if by necromancy, an aggressive poster with MADEMOISELLE OLYMPE ZABRISKI on

it in letters at least a foot high. This thing stared him in the face when he woke up, one morning. It gave him a sensation as if she had called on him overnight, and left her card.

From time to time through the day he regarded that poster with a sardonic eye. He had pitilessly resolved not to repeat the folly of the previous month. To say that this moral victory cost him nothing would be to deprive it of merit. It cost him many internal struggles. It is a fine thing to see a man seizing his temptation by the throat, and wrestling with it, and trampling it under foot like St. Anthony. This was the spectacle Van Twiller was exhibiting to the angels.

The evening Mademoiselle Olympe was to make her appearance, Van Twiller, having dined at the club, and feeling more like himself than he had felt for weeks, returned to his chamber, and, putting on dressing-gown and slippers, piled up the greater portion of his library about him and fell to reading assiduously. There is nothing like a quiet evening at home with some slight intellectual occupation, after one's features have been stroked the wrong way.

When the lively French clock on the mantel-piece — a base of malachite surmounted by a flying bronze Mercury with its arms spread gracefully on the air, and not remotely suggestive of Mademoiselle Olympe in the act of executing her grand flight from the trapeze—when the clock, I repeat, struck nine, Van Twiller paid no attention to it. That was certainly a triumph. I am anxious to render Van Twiller all the justice I can, at this point of the narrative, inasmuch as when the half-hour sounded musically, like a crystal ball dropping into a silver bowl, he rose from the chair automatically, thrust his feet into his walking-shoes, threw his overcoat across his arm, and strode out of the room.

To be weak and to scorn your weakness, and not to be able to conquer it, is, as has been said, a hard thing; and I suspect it was not with unalloyed satisfaction that Van Twiller found himself taking his seat in the back part of the private box night after night during the second engagement of Mademoiselle Olympe. It was so easy not to stay away!

In this second edition of Van Twiller's fatuity his case was even worse than before.

He not only thought of Olympe quite a number of times between breakfast and dinner, he not only attended the interlude regularly, but he began, in spite of himself, to occupy his leisure hours at night by dreaming of her. This was too much of a good thing, and Van Twiller regarded it so. Besides, the dream was always the same —a harrowing dream, a dream singularly adapted to shattering the nerves of a man like Van Twiller. He would imagine himself seated at the theatre (with all the members of Our Club in the parquette), watching Mademoiselle Olympe as usual, when suddenly that young lady would launch herself desperately from the trapeze, and come flying through the air like a firebrand hurled at his private box. Then the unfortunate man would wake up with cold drops standing on his forehead.

There is one redeeming feature in this infatuation of Van Twiller's which the sober moralist will love to look upon—the serene unconsciousness of the person who caused it. She went through her *rôle* with admirable *aplomb*, drew her salary, it may be assumed, punctually, and appears from first to last to have been ignorant that there was a miser-

able slave wearing her chains nightly in the left-hand proscenium box.

That Van Twiller, haunting the theatre with the persistency of an ex-actor, conducted himself so discreetly as not to draw the fire of Mademoiselle Olympe's blue eyes shows that Van Twiller, however deeply under a spell, was not in love. I say this, though I think if Van Twiller had not been Van Twiller, if he had been a man of no family and no position and no money, if New York had been Paris and Thirty-fourth Street a street in the Latin Quarter—but it is useless to speculate on what might have happened. What did happen is sufficient.

It happened, then, in the second week of Queen Olympe's second unconscious reign, that an appalling Whisper floated up the Hudson, effected a landing at a point between Spuyten Duyvel Creek and Cold Spring, and sought out a stately mansion of Dutch architecture standing on the bank of the river. The Whisper straightway informed the lady dwelling in this mansion that all was not well with the last of the Van Twillers; that he was gradually estranging himself from his peers, and wast-

ing his nights in a play-house watching a misguided young woman turning unmaidenly somersaults on a piece of wood attached to two ropes.

Mrs. Vanrensselaer Vanzandt Van Twiller came down to town by the next train to look into this little matter.

She found the flower of the family taking an early breakfast, at 11 A.M., in his cosey apartments on Thirty-fourth Street. With the least possible circumlocution she confronted him with what rumour had reported of his pursuits, and was pleased, but not too much pleased, when he gave her an exact account of his relations with Mademoiselle Zabriski, neither concealing nor qualifying anything. As a confession, it was unique, and might have been a great deal less entertaining. Two or three times in the course of the narrative, the matron had some difficulty in preserving the gravity of her countenance. After meditating a few minutes, she tapped Van Twiller softly on the arm with the tip of her parasol, and invited him to return with her the next day up the Hudson and make a brief visit at the home of his ancestors. He accepted the invitation with outward alacrity and inward disgust.

When this was settled, and the worthy lady had withdrawn, Van Twiller went directly to the establishment of Messrs. Ball, Black, and Company, and selected, with unerring taste, the finest diamond bracelet procurable. For his mother? Dear me, no! She had the family jewels.

I would not like to state the enormous sum Van Twiller paid for this bracelet. It was such a clasp of diamonds as would have hastened the pulsation of a patrician wrist. It was such a bracelet as Prince Camaralzaman might have sent to the Princess Badoura, and the Princess Badoura—might have been very glad to get.

In the fragrant Levant morocco case, where these happy jewels lived when they were at home, Van Twiller thoughtfully placed his card, on the back of which he had written a line begging Mademoiselle Olympe Zabriski to accept the accompanying trifle from one who had witnessed her graceful performances with interest and pleasure. This was not done inconsiderately. "Of course I must enclose my card, as I would to any lady," Van Twiller had said to himself. "A Van Twiller can neither write an anonymous letter nor make an anonymous

present." Blood entails its duties as well as its privileges.

The casket despatched to its destination, Van Twiller felt easier in his mind. He was under obligations to the girl for many an agreeable hour that might otherwise have passed heavily. He had paid the debt, and he had paid it *en prince*, as became a Van Twiller. He spent the rest of the day in looking at some pictures at Goupil's, and at the club, and in making a few purchases for his trip up the Hudson. A consciousness that this trip up the Hudson was a disorderly retreat came over him unpleasantly at intervals.

When he returned to his rooms late at night, he found a note lying on the writing-table. He started as his eye caught the words "—— Theatre" stamped in carmine letters on one corner of the envelope. Van Twiller broke the seal with trembling fingers.

Now, this note some time afterwards fell into the hands of Livingstone, who showed it to Stuyvesant, who showed it to Delaney, who showed it to me, and I copied it as a literary curiosity. The note ran as follows :—

Mr Van Twiller Dear Sir—i am verry greatfull to you for that Bracelett. it come just in the nic of time for me. The Mademoiselle Zabriski dodg is about Plaid out. my beard is getting to much for me. i shall have to grow a mustash and take to some other line of busyness, i dont no what now, but will let you no. You wont feel bad if i sell that Bracelett. i have seen Abrahams Moss and he says he will do the square thing. Pleas accep my thanks for youre Beautifull and Unexpected present.

Youre respectfull servent,
Charles Montmorenci Walters.

The next day Van Twiller neither expressed nor felt any unwillingness to spend a few weeks with his mother at the old homestead.

And then he went abroad.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

ONE morning as I was passing through Boston Common, which lies between my home and my office, I met a gentleman lounging along The Mall. I am generally preoccupied when walking, and often thrid my way through crowded streets without distinctly observing any one. But this man's face forced itself upon me, and a singular face it was. His eyes were faded, and his hair, which he wore long, was flecked with grey. His hair and eyes, if I may say so, were sixty years old, the rest of him not thirty. The youthfulness of his figure, the elasticity of his gait, and the venerable appearance of his head were incongruities that drew more than one pair of curious eyes towards him. He excited in me the painful suspicion that he had got either somebody else's head or somebody else's body. He was evidently an American, at least so far as the upper part of him was concerned—

the New England cut of countenance is unmistakable—evidently a man who had seen something of the world, but strangely young and old.

Before reaching the Park Street gate, I had taken up the thread of thought which he had unconsciously broken; yet throughout the day this old young man, with his unwrinkled brow and silvered locks, glided in like a phantom between me and my duties.

The next morning I again encountered him on The Mall. He was resting lazily on the green rails, watching two little sloops in distress, which two ragged ship-owners had consigned to the mimic perils of the Pond. The vessels lay becalmed in the middle of the ocean, displaying a tantalising lack of sympathy with the frantic helplessness of the owners on shore. As the gentleman observed their dilemma, a light came into his faded eyes, then died out, leaving them drearier than before. I wondered if he, too, in his time, had sent out ships that drifted and drifted and never came to port; and if these poor toys were to him types of his own losses.

"That man has a story, and I should like

to know it," I said, half aloud, halting in one of those winding paths which branch off from the pastoral quietness of the Pond, and end in the rush and tumult of Tremont Street.

"Would you?" exclaimed a voice at my side. I turned and faced Mr. H——, a neighbour of mine, who laughed heartily at finding me talking to myself. "Well," he added reflectingly, "I can tell you this man's story; and if you will match the narrative with anything as curious, I shall be glad to hear it."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes and no. That is to say, I do not know him personally; but I know a singular passage in his life. I happened to be in Paris when he was buried."

"Buried!"

"Well, strictly speaking, not buried, but something quite like it. If you've a spare half-hour," continued my friend H——, "we'll sit on this bench, and I will tell you all I know of an affair that made some noise in Paris a couple of years ago. The gentleman himself, standing yonder, will serve as a sort of frontispiece to the romance—a full-page illustration, as it were."

The following pages contain the story which Mr. H—— related to me. While he was telling it, a gentle wind arose; the miniature sloops drifted feebly about the ocean; the wretched owners flew from point to point, as the deceptive breeze promised to waft the barks to either shore; the early robins trilled now and then from the newly fringed elms; and the old young man leaned on the rail in the sunshine, little dreaming that two gossips were discussing his affairs within twenty yards of him.

Three persons were sitting in a *salon* whose one large window overlooked the Place Vendôme. M. Dorine, with his back half turned on the other two occupants of the apartment, was reading the *Journal des Débats* in an alcove, pausing from time to time to wipe his glasses, and taking scrupulous pains not to glance towards the lounge at his right, on which were seated Mlle. Dorine and a young American gentleman, whose handsome face rather frankly told his position in the family. There was not a happier man in Paris that afternoon than Philip Wentworth. Life had become so delicious to him that he shrunk from

looking beyond to-day. What could the future add to his full heart, what might it not take away? The deepest joy has always something of melancholy in it—a presentiment, a fleeting sadness, a feeling without a name. Wentworth was conscious of this subtle shadow that night, when he rose from the lounge and thoughtfully held Julie's hand to his lip for a moment before parting. A careless observer would not have thought him, as he was, the happiest man in Paris.

M. Dorine laid down his paper, and came forward. "If the house," he said, "is such as M. Cherbonneau describes it, I advise you to close with him at once. I would accompany you, Philip, but the truth is, I am too sad at losing this little bird to assist you in selecting a cage for her. Remember, the last train for town leaves at five. Be sure not to miss it; for we have seats for Sardou's new comedy to-morrow night. By to-morrow night," he added laughingly, "little Julie here will be an old lady—it is such an age from now until then."

The next morning the train bore Philip to one of the loveliest spots within thirty miles of Paris. An hour's walk through

green lanes brought him to M. Cherbonneau's estate. In a kind of dream the young man wandered from room to room, inspected the conservatory, the stables, the lawns, the strip of woodland through which a merry brook sang to itself continually; and, after dining with M. Cherbonneau, completed the purchase, and turned his steps towards the station just in time to catch the express train.

As Paris stretched out before him, with its lights twinkling in the early dusk, and its spires and domes melting into the evening air, it seemed to Philip as if years had elapsed since he left the city. On reaching Paris he drove to his *hôtel*, where he found several letters lying on the table. He did not trouble himself even to glance at their superscriptions as he threw aside his travelling surtout for a more appropriate dress.

If, in his impatience to return to Mlle. Dorine, the cars had appeared to walk, the fiacre which he had secured at the station appeared to creep. At last it turned into the Place Vendôme, and drew up before M. Dorine's *hôtel*. The door opened as Philip's foot touched the first step. The valet silently took his cloak and hat, with a

special deference, Philip thought; but was he not now one of the family?

"M. Dorine," said the servant slowly, "is unable to see Monsieur at present. He wishes Monsieur to be shown up to the *salon*."

"Is Mademoiselle——"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Alone?"

"Alone, Monsieur," repeated the man, looking curiously at Philip, who could scarcely repress an exclamation of pleasure.

It was the first time that such a privilege had been accorded him. His interviews with Julie had always taken place in the presence of M. Dorine, or some member of the household. A well-bred Parisian girl has but a formal acquaintance with her lover.

Philip did not linger on the staircase; with a light heart he went up the steps, two at a time, hastened through the softly lighted hall, in which he detected the faint scent of her favourite flowers, and stealthily opened the door of the *salon*.

The room was darkened. Underneath the chandelier stood a slim black casket on trestles. A lighted candle, a crucifix, and

some white flowers were on a table near by. Julie Dorine was dead.

When M. Dorine heard the sudden cry that rang through the silent house, he hurried from the library, and found Philip standing like a ghost in the middle of the chamber.

It was not until long afterwards that Wentworth learned the details of the calamity that had befallen him. On the previous night Mlle. Dorine had retired to her room in seemingly perfect health, and had dismissed her maid with a request to be awakened early the next morning. At the appointed hour the girl entered the chamber. Mlle. Dorine was sitting in an arm-chair, apparently asleep. The candle in the *bougeoir* had burned down to the socket; a book lay half open on the carpet at her feet. The girl started when she saw that the bed had not been occupied, and that her mistress still wore an evening dress. She rushed to Mlle. Dorine's side. It was not slumber; it was death.

Two messages were at once despatched to Philip, one to the station at G——, the other to his *hôtel*. The first missed him on the road, the second he had neglected to open.

On his arrival at M. Dorine's house, the valet, under the supposition that Wentworth had been advised of Mlle. Dorine's death, broke the intelligence with awkward cruelty, by showing him directly to the *salon*.

Mlle. Dorine's wealth, her beauty, the suddenness of her death, and the romance that had in some way attached itself to her love for the young American, drew crowds to witness the funeral ceremonies, which took place in the church in the Rue d'Agues-seau. The body was to be laid in M. Dorine's tomb, in the cemetery of Mont-martre.

This tomb requires a few words of de-scription. First there was a grating of filigraned iron; through this you looked into a small vestibule or hall, at the end of which was a massive door of oak opening upon a short flight of stone steps descend-ing into the tomb. The vault was fifteen or twenty feet square, ingeniously ventilated from the ceiling, but unlighted. It con-tained two sarcophagi: the first held the remains of Madame Dorine, long since dead; the other was new, and bore on one side the letters J. D., in monogram, interwoven with *fleurs-de-lis*.

The funeral train stopped at the gate of the small garden that enclosed the place of burial, only the immediate relatives following the bearers into the tomb. A slender wax candle, such as is used in Catholic churches, burned at the foot of the uncovered sarcophagus, casting a dim glow over the centre of the apartment, and deepening the shadows which seemed to huddle together in the corners. By this flickering light the coffin was placed in its granite shell, the heavy slab laid over it reverently, and the oaken door swung on its rusty hinges, shutting out the uncertain ray of sunshine that had ventured to peep in on the darkness.

M. Dorine, muffled in his cloak, threw himself on the back seat of the landau, too abstracted in his grief to observe that he was the only occupant of the vehicle. There was a sound of wheels grating on the gravelled avenue, and then all was silence again in the cemetery of Montmartre. At the main entrance the carriages parted company, dashing off into various streets at a pace that seemed to express a sense of relief.

The rattle of wheels had died out of the air when Philip opened his eyes, bewildered,

like a man abruptly roused from slumber. He raised himself on one arm and stared into the surrounding blackness. Where was he? In a second the truth flashed upon him. He had been left in the tomb!

While kneeling on the further side of the stone box, perhaps he had fainted, and during the last solemn rites his absence had been unnoticed.

His first emotion was one of natural terror. But this passed as quickly as it came. Life had ceased to be so very precious to him; and if it were his fate to die at Julie's side, was not that the fulfilment of the desire which he had expressed to himself a hundred times that morning? What did it matter, a few years sooner or later? He must lay down the burden at last. Why not then? A pang of self-reproach followed the thought. Could he so lightly throw aside the love that had bent over his cradle? The sacred name of mother rose involuntarily to his lips. Was it not cowardly to yield up without a struggle the life which he should guard for her sake? Was it not his duty to the living and the dead to face the difficulties of his position, and overcome them if it were within human power?

With an organisation as delicate as a woman's he had that spirit which, however sluggish in repose, leaps with a kind of exultation to measure its strength with disaster.

The vague fear of the supernatural, that would affect most men in a similar situation, found no room in his heart. He was simply shut in a chamber from which it was necessary that he should obtain release within a given period. That this chamber contained the body of the woman he loved, so far from adding to the terror of the case, was a circumstance from which he drew consolation. She was a beautiful white statue now. Her soul was far hence ; and if that pure spirit could return, would it not be to shield him with her love ? It was impossible that the place should not engender some thought of the kind. He did not put the thought entirely from him as he rose to his feet and stretched out his hands in the darkness ; but his mind was too healthy and practical to indulge long in such speculations.

Philip, being a smoker, chanced to have in his pocket a box of *allumettes*. After several ineffectual essays, he succeeded in igniting one against the dank wall, and by its momentary glare perceived that the

candle had been left in the tomb. This would serve him in examining the fastenings of the vault. If he could force the inner door by any means, and reach the grating, of which he had an indistinct recollection, he might hope to make himself heard. But the oaken door was immovable, as solid as the wall itself, into which it fitted air-tight. Even if he had the requisite tools, there were no fastenings to be removed; the hinges were set on the outside.

"Having ascertained this, Philip replaced the candle on the floor, and leaned against the wall thoughtfully, watching the blue fan of flame that wavered to and fro, threatening to detach itself from the wick. "At all events," he thought, "the place is ventilated." Suddenly he sprang forward and extinguished the light.

His existence depended on that candle!

He had read somewhere, in some account of shipwreck, how the survivors had lived for days upon a few candles which one of the passengers had insanely thrown into the long-boat. And here he had been burning away his very life!

By the transient illumination of one of the tapers, he looked at his watch. It had

stopped at eleven—but eleven that day, or the preceding night? The funeral, he knew, had left the church at ten. How many hours had passed since then? Of what duration had been his swoon? Alas! it was no longer possible for him to measure those hours which crawl like snails by the wretched, and fly like swallows over the happy.

He picked up the candle, and seated himself on the stone steps. He was a sanguine man, but, as he weighed the chances of escape, the prospect appalled him. Of course he would be missed. His disappearance under the circumstances would surely alarm his friends; they would institute a search for him; but who would think of searching for a live man in the cemetery of Montmartre? The *préfet* of police would set a hundred intelligences at work to find him; the Seine might be dragged, *les misérables* turned over at the Morgue; a minute description of him would be in every detective's pocket; and he—in M. Dorine's family tomb!

Yet, on the other hand, it was here he was last seen; from this point a keen detective would naturally work up the case.

Then might not the undertaker return for the candlestick, probably not left by design? Or again, might not M. Dorine send fresh wreaths of flowers, to take the place of those which now diffused a pungent, aromatic odour throughout the chamber? Ah! what unlikely chances! But if one of these things did not happen speedily, it had better never happen. How long could he keep life in himself?

With his pocket-knife Wentworth cut the half-burned candle into four equal parts. "To-night," he meditated, "I will eat the first of these pieces; to-morrow, the second; to-morrow evening, the third; the next day, the fourth; and then—then I'll wait!"

He had taken no breakfast that morning, unless a cup of coffee can be called a breakfast. He had never been very hungry before. He was ravenously hungry now. But he postponed the meal as long as practicable. It must have been near midnight, according to his calculation, when he determined to try the first of his four singular repasts. The bit of white wax was tasteless; but it served its purpose.

His appetite for the time appeased, he found a new discomfort. The humidity of

the walls, and the wind that crept through the unseen ventilator, chilled him to the bone. To keep walking was his only resource. A kind of drowsiness, too, occasionally came over him. It took all his will to fight it off. To sleep, he felt, was to die; and he had made up his mind to live.

The strangest fancies flitted through his head as he groped up and down the stone floor of the dungeon, feeling his way along the wall to avoid the sepulchres. Voices that had long been silent spoke words that had long been forgotten; faces he had known in childhood grew palpable against the dark. His whole life in detail was unrolled before him like a panorama; the changes of a year, with its burden of love and death, its sweets and its bitternesses, were epitomised in a single second. The desire to sleep had left him, but the keen hunger came again.

"It must be near morning now," he mused; "perhaps the sun is just gilding the towers of Notre Dame; or, may be, a dull, drizzling rain is beating on Paris, sobbing on these mounds above me. Paris! it seems like a dream. Did I ever walk in its gay boulevards in the golden air? Oh, the

delight and pain and passion of that sweet human life!"

Philip became conscious that the gloom, the silence, and the cold were gradually conquering him. The feverish activity of his brain brought on a reaction. He grew lethargic; he sunk down on the steps, and thought of nothing. His hand fell by chance on one of the pieces of candle; he grasped it and devoured it mechanically. This revived him. "How strange," he thought, "that I am not thirsty! Is it possible that the dampness of the walls, which I must inhale with every breath, has supplied the need of water? Not a drop has passed my lips for two days, and still I experience no thirst. That drowsiness, thank Heaven, has gone. I think I was never wide awake until this hour. It would be an anodyne like poison that could weigh down my eyelids. No doubt the dread of sleep has something to do with this."

The minutes were like hours. Now he walked as briskly as he dared up and down the tomb; now he rested against the door. More than once he was tempted to throw himself upon the stone coffin that held Julie, and make no further struggle for his life.

Only one piece of candle remained. He had eaten the third portion, not to satisfy hunger, but from a precautionary motive. He had taken it as a man takes some disagreeable drug upon the result of which hangs safety. The time was rapidly approaching when even this poor substitute for nourishment would be exhausted. He delayed that moment. He gave himself a long fast this time. The half-inch of candle which he held in his hand was a sacred thing to him. It was his last defence against death.

Finally, with such a sinking at heart as he had not known before, he raised it to his lips. Then he paused, then he hurled the fragment across the tomb, then the oaken door was flung open, and Philip, with dazzled eyes, saw M. Dorine's form sharply defined against the blue sky.

When they led him out, half blinded, into the broad daylight, M. Dorine noticed that Philip's hair, which a short time since was as black as a crow's wing, had actually turned grey in places. The man's eyes, too, had faded; the darkness had dimmed their lustre.

"And how long was he really confined in

the tomb?" I asked, as Mr. H—— concluded the story.

"*Just one hour and twenty minutes!*" replied Mr. H——, smiling blandly.

As he spoke, the Lilliputian sloops, with their sails all blown out like white roses, came floating bravely into port, and Philip Wentworth lounged by us, wearily, in the pleasant April sunshine.

Mr. H——'s narrative haunted me. Here was a man who had undergone a strange ordeal. Here was a man whose sufferings were unique. His was no threadbare experience. Eighty minutes had seemed like two days to him! If he had really been immured two days in the tomb, the story, from my point of view, would have lost its tragic value.

After this it was natural that I should regard Mr. Wentworth with stimulated curiosity. As I met him from day to day, passing through the Common with that same introspective air, there was something in his loneliness which touched me. I wondered that I had not read before in his pale, meditative face some such sad history as Mr. H—— had confided to me. I formed the

resolution of speaking to him, though with no very lucid purpose. One morning we came face to face at the intersection of two paths. He halted courteously to allow me the precedence.

"Mr. Wentworth," I began, "I——"

He interrupted me.

"My name, sir," he said, in an off-hand manner, "is Jones."

"Jo-Jo-Jones!" I gasped.

"No, not Joseph Jones," he returned, with a glacial air—"Frederick."

A dim light, in which the perfidy of my friend H—— was becoming discernible, began to break upon my mind.

It will probably be a standing wonder to Mr. Frederick Jones why a strange man accosted him one morning on the Common as "Mr. Wentworth," and then dashed madly down the nearest footpath and disappeared in the crowd.

The fact is, I had been duped by Mr. H——, who is a gentleman of literary proclivities, and has, it is whispered, become somewhat demented in brooding over the Great American Novel—not yet hatched. He had actually tried the effect of one of his chapters on me!

My hero, as I subsequently learned, is a commonplace young person, who had some connection, I know not what, with the building of that graceful granite bridge which spans the crooked silver lake in the Public Garden.

When I think of the readiness with which Mr. H—— built up his airy fabric on my credulity, I feel half inclined to laugh, though I am deeply mortified at having been the unresisting victim of his Black Art.

PÈRE ANTOINE'S DATE-PALM.

PÈRE ANTOINE'S DATE-PALM.

NEAR the Levée, and not far from the old French Cathedral in the Place d'Armes, at New Orleans, stands a fine date-palm, thirty feet in height, spreading its broad leaves in the alien air as hardily as if its sinuous roots were sucking strength from their native earth.

Sir Charles Lyell, in his *Second Visit to the United States*, mentions this exotic: "The tree is seventy or eighty years old; for Père Antoine, a Roman Catholic priest, who died about twenty years ago, told Mr. Bringier that he planted it himself, when he was young. In his will he provided that they who succeeded to this lot of ground should forfeit it if they cut down the palm."

Wishing to learn something of Père Antoine's history, Sir Charles Lyell made inquiries among the ancient Creole inhabitants of the *faubourg*. That the old priest, in his last days, became very much emaciated, that

he walked about the streets like a mummy, that he gradually dried up, and finally blew away, was the meagre and unsatisfactory result of the tourist's investigations. This is all that is generally told of Père Antoine.

In the summer of 1861, while New Orleans was yet occupied by the Confederate forces, I met at Alexandria, in Virginia, a lady from Louisiana—Miss Blondeau by name—who gave me the substance of the following legend touching Père Antoine and his wonderful date-palm. If it should appear tame to the reader, it will be because I am not habited in a black ribbed-silk dress, with a strip of point-lace around my throat, like Miss Blondeau; it will be because I lack her eyes and lips and Southern music to tell it with.

When Père Antoine was a very young man, he had a friend whom he loved as he loved his life. Émile Jardin returned his passion, and the two, on account of their friendship, became the marvel of the city where they dwelt. One was never seen without the other; for they studied, walked, ate, and slept together.

Thus began Miss Blondeau, with the air

of Fiammetta telling her prettiest story to the Florentines in the garden of Boccaccio.

Antoine and Émile were preparing to enter the Church ; indeed, they had taken the preliminary steps, when a circumstance occurred which changed the colour of their lives. A foreign lady, from some nameless island in the Pacific, had a few months before moved into their neighbourhood. The lady died suddenly, leaving a girl of sixteen or seventeen, entirely friendless and unprovided for. The young men had been kind to the woman during her illness, and at her death—melting with pity at the forlorn situation of Anglice, the daughter—swore between themselves to love and watch over her as if she were their sister.

Now Anglice had a wild, strange beauty that made other women seem tame beside her ; and in the course of time the young men found themselves regarding their ward not so much like brothers as at first. In brief, they found themselves in love with her.

They struggled with their hopeless passion month after month, neither betraying his secret to the other ; for the austere orders which they were about to assume

precluded the idea of love and marriage. Until then they had dwelt in the calm air of religious meditations, unmoved except by that pious fervour which in other ages taught men to brave the torture of the rack and to smile amid the flames. But a blonde girl, with great eyes and a voice like the soft notes of a vesper hymn, had come in between them and their ascetic dreams of heaven. The ties that had bound the young men together snapped silently one by one. At last each read in the pale face of the other the story of his own despair.

And she? If Anglice shared their trouble, her face told no story. It was like the face of a saint on a cathedral window. Once, however, as she came suddenly upon the two men and overheard words that seemed to burn like fire on the lip of the speaker, her eyes grew luminous for an instant. Then she passed on, her face as immobile as before in its setting of wavy gold hair.

"Entre or et roux Dieu fit ses longs cheveux."

One night Émile and Anglice were missing. They had flown—but whither, nobody knew, and nobody, save Antoine, cared. It was a heavy blow to Antoine—for he had

himself half resolved to confess his love to Anglice and urge her to fly with him.

A strip of paper slipped from a volume on Antoine's *prie-dieu*, and fluttered to his feet.

"*Do not be angry,*" said the bit of paper piteously; "*forgive us, for we love.*" (Pardonnez-nous, car nous aimons.)

Three years went by wearily enough. Antoine had entered the Church, and was already looked upon as a rising man; but his face was pale and his heart leaden, for there was no sweetness in life for him.

Four years had elapsed, when a letter, covered with outlandish postmarks, was brought to the young priest—a letter from Anglice. She was dying;—would he forgive her? Émile, the year previous, had fallen a victim to the fever that raged on the island; and their child, Anglice, was likely to follow him. In pitiful terms she begged Antoine to take charge of the child until she was old enough to enter the convent of the Sacré-Cœur. The epistle was finished hastily by another hand, informing Antoine of Madame Jardin's death; it also told him that Anglice had been placed on board a vessel shortly to leave the island for some Western port.

The letter, delayed by storm and shipwreck, was hardly read and wept over when little Anglice arrived.

On beholding her, Antoine uttered a cry of joy and surprise—she was so like the woman he had worshipped.

The passion that had been crowded down in his heart broke out and lavished its richness on this child, who was to him not only the Anglice of years ago, but his friend Émile Jardin also.

Anglice possessed the wild, strange beauty of her mother—the bending, willowy form, the rich tint of skin, the large tropical eyes, that had almost made Antoine's sacred robes a mockery to him.

For a month or two Anglice was wildly unhappy in her new home. She talked continually of the bright country where she was born, the fruits and flowers and blue skies, the tall, fan-like trees, and the streams that went murmuring through them to the sea. Antoine could not pacify her.

By and by she ceased to weep, and went about the cottage in a weary, disconsolate way that cut Antoine to the heart. A long-tailed paroquet, which she had brought with her in the ship, walked solemnly behind her

from room to room, mutely pining, it seemed, for those heavy orient airs that used to ruffle its brilliant plumage.

Before the year ended, he noticed that the ruddy tinge had faded from her cheek, that her eyes had grown languid, and her slight figure more willowy than ever.

A physician was consulted. He could discover nothing wrong with the child, except this fading and drooping. He failed to account for that. It was some vague disease of the mind, he said, beyond his skill.

So Anglice faded day after day. She seldom left the room now. At last Antoine could not shut out the fact that the child was passing away. He had learned to love her so !

"Dear heart," he said once, "what is 't ails thee ?"

"Nothing, *mon père*," for so she called him.

The winter passed, the balmy spring had come with its magnolia blooms and orange blossoms, and Anglice seemed to revive. In her small bamboo chair, on the porch, she swayed to and fro in the fragrant breeze, with a peculiar undulating motion, like a graceful tree.

At times something seemed to weigh upon her mind. Antoine observed it, and waited. Finally she spoke.

"Near our house," said little Anglice—"near our house, on the island, the palm-trees are waving under the blue sky. Oh, how beautiful! I seem to lie beneath them all day long. I am very, very happy. I yearned for them so much that I grew ill—don't you think it was so, *mon père?*"

"*Hélas*, yes!" exclaimed Antoine suddenly. "Let us hasten to those pleasant islands where the palms are waving."

Anglice smiled.

"I am going there, *mon père*."

A week from that evening the wax candles burned at her feet and forehead, lighting her on the journey.

All was over. Now was Antoine's heart empty. Death, like another Émile, had stolen his new Anglice. He had nothing to do but to lay the blighted flower away.

Père Antoine made a shallow grave in his garden, and heaped the fresh brown mould over his idol.

In the tranquil spring evenings the priest was seen sitting by the mound, his finger closed in the unread breviary.

The summer broke on that sunny land; and in the cool morning twilight, and after nightfall, Antoine lingered by the grave. He could never be with it enough.

One morning he observed a delicate stem, with two curiously shaped emerald leaves, springing up from the centre of the mound. At first he merely noticed it casually; but presently the plant grew so tall, and was so strangely unlike anything he had ever seen before, that he examined it with care.

How straight and graceful and exquisite it was! When it swung to and fro with the summer wind, in the twilight, it seemed to Antoine as if little Anglice were standing there in the garden.

The days stole by, and Antoine tended the fragile shoot, wondering what manner of blossom it would unfold, white, or scarlet, or golden. One Sunday, a stranger, with a bronzed, weather-beaten face like a sailor's, leaned over the garden rail, and said to him—

"What a fine young date-palm you have there, sir!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Père Antoine, starting, "and is it a palm?"

"Yes, indeed," returned the man. "I

didn't reckon the tree would flourish in this latitude."

"*Ah, mon Dieu!*" was all the priest could say aloud; but he murmured to himself, "*Bon Dieu, vous m'avez donné cela!*"

If Père Antoine loved the tree before, he worshipped it now. He watered it, and nurtured it, and could have clasped it in his arms. Here were Émile and Anglice and the child, all in one!

The years glided away, and the date-palm and the priest grew together—only one became vigorous and the other feeble. Père Antoine had long passed the meridian of life. The tree was in its youth. It no longer stood in an isolated garden; for pretentious brick and stucco houses had clustered about Antoine's cottage. They looked down scowling on the humble thatched roof. The city was edging up, trying to crowd him off his land. But he clung to it like lichen, and refused to sell.

Speculators piled gold on his doorsteps, and he laughed at them. Sometimes he was hungry, and cold, and thinly clad; but he laughed none the less.

"Get thee behind me, Satan!" said the old priest's smile.

Père Antoine was very old now, scarcely able to walk; but he could sit under the pliant, caressing leaves of his palm, loving it like an Arab; and there he sat till the grimmest of speculators came to him. But even in death Père Antoine was faithful to his trust.

The owner of that land loses it if he harm the date-tree.

And there it stands in the narrow, dingy street, a beautiful, dreamy stranger, an exquisite foreign lady whose grace is a joy to the eye, the incense of whose breath makes the air enamoured. May the hand wither that touches her ungently!

"*Because it grew from the heart of little Anglice,*" said Miss Blondeau tenderly.

QUITE SO.

I.

OF course that was not his name. Even in the State of Maine, where it is still a custom to maim a child for life by christening him Arioch or Shadrach or Ephraim, nobody would dream of calling a boy "Quite So." It was merely a nickname which we gave him in camp; but it stuck to him with such bur-like tenacity, and is so inseparable from my memory of him, that I do not think I could write definitely of John Bladburn if I were to call him anything but "Quite So."

It was one night shortly after the first battle of Bull Run. The Army of the Potomac, shattered, stunned, and forlorn, was back in its old quarters behind the earthworks. The melancholy line of ambulances bearing our wounded to Washington was not done creeping over Long Bridge; the blue smocks and the grey still lay in windrows on the field of Manassas; and the

gloom that weighed down our hearts was like the fog that stretched along the bosom of the Potomac, and enfolded the valley of the Shenandoah. A drizzling rain had set in at twilight, and growing bolder with the darkness, was beating a dismal tattoo on the tent—the tent of Mess 6, Company A, —th Regiment, N. Y. Volunteers. Our mess, consisting originally of eight men, was reduced to four. Little Billy, as one of the boys grimly remarked, had concluded to remain at Manassas; Corporal Steele we had to leave at Fairfax Court-House, shot through the hip; Hunter and Suydam we had said good-bye to that afternoon. "Tell Johnny Reb," says Hunter, lifting up the leather side-piece of the ambulance, "that I'll be back again as soon as I get a new leg." But Suydam said nothing; he only unclosed his eyes languidly and smiled farewell to us.

The four of us who were left alive and unhurt that shameful July day sat gloomily smoking our brier-wood pipes, thinking our thoughts, and listening to the rain pattering against the canvas. That, and the occasional whine of a hungry cur, foraging on the outskirts of the camp for a stray bone, alone broke the silence, save when a vicious

drop of rain detached itself meditatively from the ridge-pole of the tent, and fell upon the wick of our tallow candle, making it "cuss," as Ned Strong described it. The candle was in the midst of one of its most profane fits when Blakely, knocking the ashes from his pipe and addressing no one in particular, but giving breath, unconsciously, as it were, to the result of his cogitations, observed that "it was considerable of a fizzle."

"The 'on to Richmond' business?"

"Yes."

"I wonder what they'll do about it over yonder," said Curtis, pointing over his right shoulder. By "over yonder" he meant the North in general, and Massachusetts especially. Curtis was a Boston boy, and his sense of locality was so strong that, during all his wanderings in Virginia, I do not believe there was a moment, day or night, when he could not have made a bee-line for Faneuil Hall.

"Do about it?" cried Strong. "They'll make about two hundred thousand blue flannel trousers and send them along, each pair with a man in it—all the short men in the long trousers, and all the tall men in the

short ones," he added, ruefully contemplating his own leg-gear, which scarcely reached to his ankles.

"That 's so," said Blakely. "Just now, when I was tackling the commissary for an extra candle, I saw a crowd of new fellows drawing blankets."

"I say there, drop that!" cried Strong. "All right, sir, didn't know it was you," he added hastily, seeing it was Lieutenant Haines who had thrown back the flap of the tent, and let in a gust of wind and rain that threatened the most serious bronchial consequences to our discontented tallow dip.

"You 're to bunk in here," said the lieutenant, speaking to some one outside. The some one stepped in, and Haines vanished in the darkness.

When Strong had succeeded in restoring the candle to consciousness, the light fell upon a tall, shy-looking man of about thirty-five, with long, hay-coloured beard and moustache, upon which the rain-drops stood in clusters, like the night-dew on patches of cobweb in a meadow. It was an honest face, with unworldly sort of blue eyes, that looked out from under the broad visor of the infantry cap. With a deferen-

tial glance towards us, the new-comer unstrapped his knapsack, spread his blanket over it, and sat down unobtrusively.

"Rather damp night out," remarked Blakely, whose strong hand was supposed to be conversation.

"Quite so," replied the stranger, not curtly, but pleasantly, and with an air as if he had said all there was to be said about it.

"Come from the North recently?" inquired Blakely, after a pause.

"Yes."

"From any place in particular?"

"Maine."

"People considerably stirred up down there?" continued Blakely, determined not to give up.

"Quite so."

Blakely threw a puzzled look over the tent, and seeing Ned Strong on the broad grin, frowned severely. Strong instantly assumed an abstracted air, and began humming softly—

"I wish I was in Dixie."

"The State of Maine," observed Blakely, with a certain defiance of manner not at all

necessary in discussing a geographical question, "is a pleasant State."

"In summer," suggested the stranger.

"In summer, I mean," returned Blakely with animation, thinking he had broken the ice. "Cold as blazes in winter, though—isn't it?'

The new recruit merely nodded.

Blakely eyed the man homicidally for a moment, and then, smiling one of those smiles of simulated gaiety which the novelists inform us are more tragic than tears, turned upon him with withering irony—

"Trust you left the old folks pretty comfortable?"

"Dead."

"The old folks dead!"

"Quite so."

Blakely made a sudden dive for his blanket, tucked it around him with painful precision, and was heard no more.

Just then the bugle sounded "lights out," —bugle answering bugle in far-off camps. When our not elaborate night-toilets were complete, Strong threw somebody else's old boot at the candle with infallible aim, and darkness took possession of the tent. Ned, who lay on my left, presently reached over

to me, and whispered, "I say, our friend 'quite so' is a garrulous old boy! He'll talk himself to death some of these odd times, if he isn't careful. How he *did* run on!"

The next morning, when I opened my eyes, the new member of Mess 6 was sitting on his knapsack combing his blonde beard with a horn comb. He nodded pleasantly to me, and to each of the boys as they woke up, one by one. Blakely did not appear disposed to renew the animated conversation of the previous night; but while he was gone to make a requisition for what was in pure sarcasm called coffee, Curtis ventured to ask the man his name.

"Bladburn, John," was the reply.

"That's rather an unwieldy name for everyday use," put in Strong. "If it wouldn't hurt your feelings, I'd like to call you Quite So—for short. Don't say no, if you don't like it. Is it agreeable?"

Bladburn gave a little laugh, all to himself, seemingly, and was about to say, "Quite so," when he caught at the words, blushed like a girl, and nodded a sunny assent to Strong. From that day, until the end, the sobriquet clung to him.

The disaster at Bull Run was followed, as the reader knows, by a long period of masterly inactivity, so far as the Army of the Potomac was concerned. McDowell, a good soldier, but unlucky, retired to Arlington Heights, and McClellan, who had distinguished himself in Western Virginia, took command of the forces in front of Washington, and bent his energies to reorganising the demoralised troops. It was a dreary time to the people of the North, who looked fatuously from week to week for "the fall of Richmond;" and it was a dreary time to the denizens of that vast city of tents and forts which stretched in a semicircle before the beleaguered Capitol—so tedious and soul-wearing a time that the hardships of forced marches and the horrors of battle became desirable things to them.

Roll-call morning and evening, guard-duty, dress parades, an occasional reconnaissance, dominoes, wrestling matches, and such rude games as could be carried on in camp, made up the sum of our lives. The arrival of the mail with letters and papers from home was the event of the day. We noticed that Bladburn neither wrote nor received any letters. When the rest of the boys were

scribbling away for dear life, with drum-heads and knapsacks and cracker-boxes for writing-desks, he would sit serenely smoking his pipe, but looking out on us through rings of smoke with a face expressive of the tenderest interest.

"Look here, Quite So," Strong would say, "the mail-bag closes in half an hour. Ain't you going to write?"

"I believe not to-day," Bladburn would reply, as if he had written yesterday, or would write to-morrow: but he never wrote.

He had become a great favourite with us, and with all the officers of the regiment. He talked less than any man I ever knew, but there was nothing sinister or sullen in his reticence. It was sunshine,—warmth and brightness, but no voice. Unassuming and modest to the verge of shyness, he impressed every one as a man of singular pluck and nerve.

"Do you know," said Curtis to me one day, "that that fellow Quite So is clear grit, and when we come to close quarters with our Palmetto brethren over yonder, he'll do something devilish?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, nothing quite explainable; the exasperating coolness of the man, as much as anything. This morning the boys were teasing Muffin Fan [a small mulatto girl who used to bring muffins into camp three times a week,—at the peril of her life!] and Jemmy Blunt, of Company K,—you know him—was rather rough on the girl, when Quite So, who had been reading under a tree, shut one finger in his book, walked over to where the boys were skylarking, and with the smile of a juvenile angel on his face lifted Jemmy out of that and set him down gently in front of his own tent. There Blunt sat speechless, staring at Quite So, who was back again under the tree, pegging away at his little Latin grammar."

That Latin grammar! He always had it about him, reading it or turning over its dog's-eared pages at odd intervals and in out of the way places. Half a dozen times a day he would draw it out from the bosom of his blouse, which had taken the shape of the book just over the left breast, look at it as if to assure himself it was all right, and then put the thing back. At night the volume lay beneath his pillow. The first thing in the morning, before he was well

awake, his hand would go groping instinctively under his knapsack in search of it.

A devastating curiosity seized upon us boys concerning that Latin grammar, for we had discovered the nature of the book. Strong wanted to steal it one night, but concluded not to. "In the first place," reflected Strong, "I haven't the heart to do it, and in the next place I haven't the moral courage. Quite So would placidly break every bone in my body." And I believe Strong was not far out of the way.

Sometimes I was vexed with myself for allowing this tall, simple-hearted country fellow to puzzle me so much. And yet, was he a simple-hearted country fellow? City bred he certainly was not; but his manner, in spite of his awkwardness, had an indescribable air of refinement. Now and then, too, he dropped a word or a phrase that showed his familiarity with unexpected lines of reading. "The other day," said Curtis, with the slightest elevation of eyebrow, "he had the cheek to correct my Latin for me." In short, Quite So was a daily problem to the members of Mess 6. Whenever he was absent, and Blakely and Curtis and Strong and I got together in the tent, we discussed

him, evolving various theories to explain why he never wrote to anybody and why nobody ever wrote to him. Had the man committed some terrible crime, and fled to the army to hide his guilt? Blakely suggested that he must have murdered "the old folks." What did he mean by eternally conning that tattered Latin grammar? And was his name Bladburn, anyhow? Even his imperturbable amiability became suspicious. And then his frightful reticence! If he was the victim of any deep grief or crushing calamity, why didn't he seem unhappy? What business had he to be cheerful?

"It's my opinion," said Strong, "that he's a rival Wandering Jew; the original Jacobs, you know, was a dark fellow."

Blakely inferred from something Bladburn had said, or something he had not said—which was more likely—that he had been a schoolmaster at some period of his life.

"Schoolmaster be hanged!" was Strong's comment. "Can you fancy a schoolmaster going about conjugating baby verbs out of a dratted little spelling-book? No, Quite So has evidently been a—a—— Blest if I can imagine *what* he 's been!"

Whatever John Bladburn had been, he

was a lonely man. Whenever I want a type of perfect human isolation, I shall think of him, as he was in those days, moving remote, self-contained, and alone in the midst of two hundred thousand men.

II.

THE Indian summer, with its infinite beauty and tenderness, came like a reproach that year to Virginia. The foliage, touched here and there with prismatic tints, drooped motionless in the golden haze. The delicate Virginia creeper was almost minded to put forth its scarlet buds again. No wonder the lovely phantom—this dusky Southern sister of the pale Northern June—lingered not long with us, but, filling the once peaceful glens and valleys with her pathos, stole away rebukefully before the savage enginery of man.

The preparations that had been going on for months in arsenals and foundries at the North were nearly completed. For weeks past the air had been filled with rumours of an advance ; but the rumour of to-day refuted the rumour of yesterday, and the Grand Army did not move. Heintzelman's corps was constantly folding its tents, like the

Arabs, and as silently stealing away; but somehow it was always in the same place the next morning. One day, at last, orders came down for our brigade to move.

"We're going to Richmond, boys!" shouted Strong, thrusting his head in at the tent; and we all cheered and waved our caps like mad. You see, Big Bethel and Bull Run and Ball's Bluff (the bloody B's, as we used to call them) hadn't taught us any better sense.

Rising abruptly from the plateau, to the left of our encampment, was a tall hill covered with a stunted growth of red-oak, persimmon, and chestnut. The night before we struck tents I climbed up to the crest to take a parting look at a spectacle which custom had not been able to rob of its enchantment. There, at my feet, and extending miles and miles away, lay the camps of the Grand Army, with its camp-fires reflected luridly against the sky. Thousands of lights were twinkling in every direction, some nestling in the valley, some like fireflies beating their wings and palpitating among the trees, and others stretching in parallel lines and curves, like the street-lamps of a city. Somewhere, far off, a band was play-

ing, at intervals it seemed; and now and then, nearer to, a silvery strain from a bugle shot sharply up through the night, and seemed to lose itself like a rocket among the stars—the patient, untroubled stars. Suddenly a hand was laid upon my arm.

"I 'd like to say a word to you," said Bladburn.

With a little start of surprise, I made room for him on the fallen tree where I was seated.

"I mayn't get another chance," he said. "You and the boys have been very kind to me, kinder than I deserve; but sometimes I 've fancied that my not saying anything about myself had given you the idea that all was not right in my past. I want to say that I came down to Virginia with a clean record."

"We never really doubted it, Bladburn."

"If I didn't write home," he continued, "it was because I hadn't any home, neither kith nor kin. When I said the old folks were dead, I said it. Am I boring you? If I thought I was——"

"No, Bladburn. I have often wanted you to talk to me about yourself, not from idle curiosity, I trust, but because I liked you

that rainy night when you came to camp, and have gone on liking you ever since. This isn't too much to say, when Heaven only knows how soon I may be past saying it or you listening to it."

"That 's it," said Bladburn hurriedly; "that 's why I want to talk with you. I 've a fancy that I sha'n't come out of our first battle."

The words gave me a queer start, for I had been trying several days to throw off a similar presentiment concerning him—a foolish presentiment that grew out of a dream.

"In case anything of that kind turns up," he continued, "I 'd like you to have my Latin grammar here—you 've seen me reading it. You might stick it away in a bookcase, for the sake of old times. It goes against me to think of it falling into rough hands or being kicked about camp and trampled under foot."

He was drumming softly with his fingers on the volume in the bosom of his blouse.

"I didn't intend to speak of this to a living soul," he went on, motioning me not to answer him; "but something took hold of me to-night and made me follow you up

here. Perhaps if I told you all, you would be the more willing to look after the little book in case it goes ill with me. When the war broke out I was teaching school down in Maine, in the same village where my father was schoolmaster before me. The old man when he died left me quite alone. I lived pretty much by myself, having no interests outside of the district school, which seemed in a manner my personal property. Eight years ago last spring a new pupil was brought to the school, a slight slip of a girl, with a sad kind of face and quiet ways. Perhaps it was because she wasn't very strong, and perhaps because she wasn't used over well by those who had charge of her, or perhaps it was because my life was lonely, that my heart warmed to the child. It all seems like a dream now, since that April morning when little Mary stood in front of my desk with her pretty eyes looking down bashfully and her soft hair falling over her face. One day I look up, and six years have gone by—as they go by in dreams—and among the scholars is a tall girl of sixteen, with serious womanly eyes which I cannot trust myself to look upon. The old life has come to an end. The child has become a

woman, and can teach the master now. So help me Heaven, I didn't know that I loved her until that day!

"Long after the children had gone home I sat in the schoolroom with my face resting on my hands. There was her desk, the afternoon shadows falling across it. It never looked empty and cheerless before. I went and stood by the low chair, as I had stood hundreds of times. On the desk was a pile of books, ready to be taken away, and among the rest a small Latin grammar which we had studied together. What little despairs and triumphs and happy hours were associated with it! I took it up curiously, as if it were some gentle dead thing, and turned over the pages, and could hardly see them. Turning the pages, idly so, I came to a leaf on which something was written with ink, in the familiar girlish hand. It was only the words 'Dear John,' through which she had drawn two hasty pencil lines—I wish she hadn't drawn those lines!" added Bladburn, under his breath.

He was silent for a minute or two, looking off towards the camps, where the lights were fading out one by one

"I had no right to go and love Mary. I

was twice her age, an awkward, unsocial man, that would have blighted her youth. I was as wrong as wrong can be. But I never meant to tell her. I locked the grammar in my desk and the secret in my heart for a year. I couldn't bear to meet her in the village, and kept away from every place where she was likely to be. Then she came to me, and sat down at my feet penitently, just as she used to do when she was a child, and asked what she had done to anger me; and then, Heaven forgive me! I told her all, and asked her if she could say with her lips the words she had written, and she nestled in my arms all a-trembling like a bird, and said them over and over again.

"When Mary's family heard of our engagement, there was trouble. They looked higher for Mary than a middle-aged schoolmaster. No blame to them. They forbade me the house, her uncles; but we met in the village and at the neighbours' houses, and I was happy, knowing she loved me. Matters were in this state when the war came on. I had a strong call to look after the old flag, and I hung my head that day when the company raised in our village marched by the schoolhouse to the railroad station; but

I couldn't tear myself away. About this time the minister's son, who had been away to college, came to the village. He met Mary here and there, and they became great friends. He was a likely fellow, near her own age, and it was natural they should like one another. Sometimes I winced at seeing him made free of the home from which I was shut out; then I would open the grammar at the leaf where 'Dear John' was written up in the corner, and my trouble was gone. Mary was sorrowful and pale these days, and I think her people were worrying her.

"It was one evening two or three days before we got the news of Bull Run. I had gone down to the burying-ground to trim the spruce hedge set round the old man's lot, and was just stepping into the enclosure, when I heard voices from the opposite side. One was Mary's, and the other I knew to be young Marston's, the minister's son. I didn't mean to listen, but what Mary was saying struck me dumb. *We must never meet again*, she was saying in a wild way. *We must say good-bye here, for ever,—good-bye, good-bye!* And I could hear her sobbing. Then, presently, she said hurriedly, *No*,

no; my hand, not my lips! Then it seemed he kissed her hands, and the two parted, one going towards the parsonage, and the other out by the gate near where I stood.

"I don't know how long I stood there, but the night-dews had wet me to the bone when I stole out of the graveyard and across the road to the schoolhouse. I unlocked the door, and took the Latin grammar from the desk and hid it in my bosom. There was not a sound or a light anywhere as I walked out of the village. And now," said Bladburn, rising suddenly from the tree-trunk, "if the little book ever falls in your way, won't you see that it comes to no harm, for my sake, and for the sake of the little woman who was true to me and didn't love me? Wherever she is to-night, God bless her!"

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As we descended to camp with our arms resting on each other's shoulder, the watch-fires were burning low in the valleys and along the hillsides, and as far as the eye could reach the silent tents lay bleaching in the moonlight.

III.

WE imagined that the throwing forward of our brigade was the initial movement of a general advance of the army; but that, as the reader will remember, did not take place until the following March. The Confederates had fallen back to Centreville without firing a shot, and the national troops were in possession of Lewinsville, Vienna, and Fairfax Court-House. Our new position was nearly identical with that which we had occupied on the night previous to the battle of Bull Run—on the old turnpike road to Manassas, where the enemy was supposed to be in great force. With a field-glass we could see the Rebel pickets moving in a belt of woodland on our right, and morning and evening we heard the spiteful roll of their snare-drums.

Those pickets soon became a nuisance to us. Hardly a night passed but they fired upon our outposts, so far with no harmful

result; but after a while it grew to be a serious matter. The Rebels would crawl out on all-fours from the wood into a field covered with underbrush, and lie there in the dark for hours, waiting for a shot. Then our men took to the rifle-pits—pits ten or twelve feet long by four or five deep, with the loose earth banked up a few inches high on the exposed sides. All the pits bore names, more or less felicitous, by which they were known to their transient tenants. One was called "The Pepper-Box," another "Uncle Sam's Well," another "The Reb-Trap," and another, I am constrained to say, was named after a not to be mentioned tropical locality. Though this rude sort of nomenclature predominated, there was no lack of softer titles, such as "Fortress Matilda" and "Castle Mary," and one had, though unintentionally, a literary flavour to it, "Blair's Grave," which was not popularly considered as reflecting unpleasantly on Nat Blair, who had assisted in making the excavation.

Some of the regiment had discovered a field of late corn in the neighbourhood, and used to boil a few ears every day, while it lasted, for the boys detailed on the night-

picket. The corn-cobs were always scrupulously preserved and mounted on the parapets of the pits. Whenever a Rebel shot carried away one of these *barbette* guns, there was swearing in that particular trench. Strong, who was very sensitive to this kind of disaster, was complaining bitterly one morning, because he had lost three "pieces" the night before.

"There's Quite So, now," said Strong, "when a Minie-ball comes *ping!* and knocks one of his guns to flinders, he merely smiles, and doesn't at all see the degradation of the thing."

Poor Bladburn! As I watched him day by day going about his duties, in his shy, cheery way, with a smile for every one and not an extra word for anybody, it was hard to believe he was the same man who, that night before we broke camp by the Potomac, had poured out to me the story of his love and sorrow in words that burned in my memory.

While Strong was speaking, Blakely lifted aside the flap of the tent and looked in on us.

"Boys, Quite So was hurt last night," he said, with a white tremor to his lip.

"What!"

"Shot on picket."

"Why, he was in the pit next to mine," cried Strong.

"Badly hurt?"

"Badly hurt."

I knew he was; I need not have asked the question. He never meant to go back to New England!

Bladburn was lying on the stretcher in the hospital tent. The surgeon had knelt down by him, and was carefully cutting away the bosom of his blouse. The Latin grammar, stained and torn, slipped, and fell to the floor. Bladburn gave me a quick glance. I picked up the book, and as I placed it in his hand, the icy fingers closed softly over mine. He was sinking fast. In a few minutes the surgeon finished his examination. When he rose to his feet there were tears on his weather-beaten cheeks. He was a rough outside, but a tender heart.

"My poor lad," he blurted out, "it's no use. If you've anything to say, say it now, for you've nearly done with this world."

Then Bladburn lifted his eyes slowly to the surgeon, and the old smile flitted over his face as he murmured—

"Quite so."

A RIVERMOUTH ROMANCE.

I.

AT five o'clock on the morning of the tenth of July 1860, the front door of a certain house on Anchor Street, in the ancient seaport town of Rivermouth, might have been observed to open with great caution. This door, as the least imaginative reader may easily conjecture, did not open itself. It was opened by Miss Margaret Callaghan, who immediately closed it softly behind her, paused for a few seconds with an embarrassed air on the stone step, and then, throwing a furtive glance up at the second-story windows, passed hastily down the street towards the river, keeping close to the fences and garden walls on her left.

There was a ghost-like stealthiness to Miss Margaret's movements, though there was nothing whatever of the ghost about Miss Margaret herself. She was a plump, short person, no longer young, with coal-black hair growing low on the forehead, and a round

face that would have been nearly meaningless if the features had not been emphasised—italicised, so to speak—by the small-pox. Moreover, the brilliancy of her toilet would have rendered any ghostly hypothesis untenable. Mrs. Solomon (we refer to the dressiest Mrs. Solomon, whichever one that was) in all her glory was not arrayed like Miss Margaret on that eventful summer morning. She wore a light-green, shot-silk frock, a blazing red shawl, and a yellow crape bonnet profusely decorated with azure, orange, and magenta artificial flowers. In her hand she carried a white parasol. The newly risen sun, ricocheting from the bosom of the river, and striking point-blank on the top-knot of Miss Margaret's gorgeousness, made her an imposing spectacle in the quiet street of that Puritan village. But, in spite of the bravery of her apparel, she stole guiltily along by garden walls and fences until she reached a small, dingy frame-house near the wharves, in the darkened doorway of which she quenched her burning splendour, if so bold a figure is permissible.

Three-quarters of an hour passed. The sunshine moved slowly up Anchor Street, fingered noiselessly the well-kept brass

knockers on either side, and drained the heeltaps of dew which had been left from the revels of the fairies overnight in the cups of the morning-glories. Not a soul was stirring yet in this part of the town, though the Rivermouthians are such early birds that not a worm may be said to escape them. By and by one of the brown Holland shades at one of the upper windows of the Bilkins mansion—the house from which Miss Margaret had emerged—was drawn up, and old Mr. Bilkins in spiral nightcap looked out on the sunny street. Not a living creature was to be seen, save the dissipated family cat—a very Lovelace of a cat that was not allowed a night-key—who was sitting on the curbstone opposite, waiting for the hall door to be opened. Three-quarters of an hour, we repeat, had passed, when Mrs. Margaret O'Rourke, *née* Callaghan, issued from the small, dingy house by the river, and regained the door-step of the Bilkins mansion in the same stealthy fashion in which she had left it.

Not to prolong a mystery that must already oppress the reader, Mr. Bilkins's cook had, after the manner of her kind, stolen out of the premises before the family

were up, and got herself married—surreptitiously and artfully married, as if matrimony were an indictable offence.

And something of an offence it was in this instance. In the first place Margaret Callaghan had lived nearly twenty years with the Bilkins family, and the old people —there were no children now—had rewarded this long service by taking Margaret into their affections. It was a piece of subtle ingratitude for her to marry without admitting the worthy couple to her confidence. In the next place, Margaret had married a man some eighteen years younger than herself. That was the young man's lookout, you say. We hold it was Margaret that was to blame. What does a young blade of twenty-two know? Not half so much as he thinks he does. His exhaustless ignorance at that age is a discovery which is left for him to make in his prime.

"Curly gold locks cover foolish brains,
Billing and cooing is all your cheer;
Sighing and singing of midnight strains,
Under Bonnybell's window panes,—
Wait till you come to Forty Year!"

In one sense Margaret's husband *had*

come to forty year—she was forty to a day.

Mrs. Margaret O'Rourke, with the baddish cat following closely at her heels, entered the Bilkins mansion, reached her chamber in the attic without being intercepted, and there laid aside her finery. Two or three times, while arranging her more humble attire, she paused to take a look at the marriage certificate, which she had deposited between the leaves of her Prayer Book, and on each occasion held that potent document upside down; for Margaret's literary culture was of the severest order, and excluded the art of reading.

The breakfast was late that morning. As Mrs. O'Rourke set the coffee-urn in front of Mrs. Bilkins and flanked Mr. Bilkins with the broiled mackerel and buttered toast, Mrs. O'Rourke's conscience smote her. She afterwards declared that when she saw the two sitting there so innocent-like, not dreaming of the *comether* she had put upon them, she secretly and unbeknownt let a few tears fall into the cream pitcher. Whether or not it was this material expression of Margaret's penitence that spoiled the coffee does not admit of inquiry; but the coffee was bad.

In fact, the whole breakfast was a comedy of errors.

It was a blessed relief to Margaret when the meal was ended. She retired in a cold perspiration to the penetralia of the kitchen, and it was remarked by both Mr. and Mrs. Bilkins that those short flights of vocalism—apropos of the personal charms of one Kate Kearney who lived on the banks of Killarney—which ordinarily issued from the direction of the scullery were unheard that forenoon.

The town clock was striking eleven, and the antiquated timepiece on the staircase (which never spoke but it dropped pearls and crystals, like the fairy in the story) was lisping the hour, when there came three tremendous knocks at the street door. Mrs. Bilkins, who was dusting the brass-mounted chronometer in the hall, stood transfixed, with arm uplifted. The admirable old lady had for years been carrying on a guerilla warfare with itinerant vendors of furniture polish, and pain-killer, and crockery cement, and the like. The effrontery of the triple knock convinced her the enemy was at her gates—possibly that dissolute creature with twenty-four sheets of note-paper and twenty-four envelopes for fifteen cents.

Mrs. Bilkins swept across the hall, and opened the door with a jerk. The suddenness of the movement was apparently not anticipated by the person outside, who, with one arm stretched feebly towards the receding knocker, tilted gently forward, and rested both hands on the threshold in an attitude which was probably common enough with our ancestors of the Simian period, but could never have been considered graceful. By an effort that testified to the excellent condition of his muscles, the person instantly righted himself, and stood swaying unsteadily on his toes and heels, and smiling rather vaguely on Mrs. Bilkins.

It was a slightly-built but well-knitted young fellow, in the not unpicturesque garb of our marine service. His woollen cap, pitched forward at an acute angle with his nose, showed the back part of a head thatched with short yellow hair, which had broken into innumerable curls of painful tightness. On his ruddy cheeks a sparse sandy beard was making a timid *début*. Add to this a weak, good-natured mouth, a pair of devil-may-care blue eyes, and the fact that the man was very drunk, and you have a pre-Raphaelite portrait—we may as

well say it at once—of Mr. Larry O'Rourke of Mullingar, County Westmeath, and late of the United States sloop-of-war *Santee*.

The man was a total stranger to Mrs. Bilkins; but the instant she caught sight of the double white anchors embroidered on the lapels of his jacket, she unhesitatingly threw back the door, which with great presence of mind she had partly closed.

A drunken sailor standing on the step of the Bilkins mansion was no novelty. The street, as we have stated, led down to the wharves, and sailors were constantly passing. The house abutted directly on the street; the granite door-step was almost flush with the sidewalk, and the huge old-fashioned brass knocker—seemingly a brazen hand that had been cut off at the wrist, and nailed against the oak as a warning to malefactors—extended itself in a kind of grim appeal to everybody. It seemed to possess strange fascinations for all seafaring folk; and when there was a man-of-war in port the rat-tat-tat of that knocker would frequently startle the quiet neighbourhood long after midnight. There appeared to be an occult understanding between it and the blue-jackets. Years ago there was a young Bilkins, one Pen-

dexter Bilkins—a sad losel, we fear—who ran away to try his fortunes before the mast, and fell overboard in a gale off Hatteras. "Lost at sea," says the chubby marble slab in the Old South Burying-Ground, "*ætat* 18." Perhaps that is why no blue-jacket, sober or drunk, was ever repulsed from the door of the Bilkins mansion.

Of course Mrs. Bilkins had her taste in the matter, and preferred them sober. But as this could not always be, she tempered her wind, so to speak, to the shorn lamb. The flushed, prematurely old face that now looked up at her moved the good lady's pity.

"What do you want?" she asked kindly.

"Me wife."

"There's no wife for you here," said Mrs. Bilkins, somewhat taken aback. "His wife!" she thought; "it's a mother the poor boy stands in need of."

"Me wife," repeated Mr. O'Rourke, "for betther or for worse."

"You had better go away," said Mrs. Bilkins, bridling up, "or it will be the worse for you."

"To have and to howld," continued Mr. O'Rourke, wandering retrospectively in the

mazes of the marriage service,—"to have and to howld, till death—bad luck to him! —takes one or the ither of us."

"You 're a blasphemous creature," said Mrs. Bilkins severely.

"Thim 's the words his riverince spake this mornin', standin' foreninst us," explained Mr. O'Rourke. "I stood here, see, and me jew'l stood there, and the howly chaplain beyont."

And Mr. O'Rourke with a wavering forefinger drew a diagram of the interesting situation on the door-step.

"Well," returned Mrs. Bilkins, "if you 're a married man, all I have to say is, there 's a pair of fools instead of one. You had better be off; the person you want doesn't live here."

"Bedad, thin, but she does."

"Lives here?"

"Sorra a place else."

"The man 's crazy," said Mrs. Bilkins to herself.

While she thought him simply drunk she was not in the least afraid; but the idea that she was conversing with a madman sent a chill over her. She reached back her hand preparatory to shutting the door, when Mr.

O'Rourke, with an agility that might have been expected from his previous gymnastics, set one foot on the threshold and frustrated the design.

"I want me wife," he said sternly.

Unfortunately Mr. Bilkins had gone up town, and there was no one in the house except Margaret, whose pluck was not to be depended on. The case was urgent. With the energy of despair Mrs. Bilkins suddenly placed the toe of her boot against Mr. O'Rourke's invading foot, and pushed it away. The effect of this attack was to cause Mr. O'Rourke to describe a complete circle on one leg, and then sit down heavily on the threshold. The lady retreated to the hat-stand, and rested her hand mechanically on the handle of a blue cotton umbrella. Mr. O'Rourke partly turned his head and smiled upon her with conscious superiority. At this juncture a third actor appeared on the scene, evidently a friend of Mr. O'Rourke, for he addressed that gentleman as "a spalpeen," and told him to go home.

"Divil an inch," replied the spalpeen; but he got himself off the threshold, and resumed his position on the step.

"It 's only Larry, mum," said the man,

touching his forelock politely; "as dacent a lad as iver lived, when he 's not in liquor; an' I 've known him to be sober for days togither," he added reflectively. "He don't mane a ha'p'orth o' harum, but jist now he 's not quite in his right moind."

"I should think not," said Mrs. Bilkins, turning from the speaker to Mr. O'Rourke, who had seated himself gravely on the scraper, and was weeping. "Hasn't the man any friends?"

"Too many of 'em, mum, an' it 's along wid dhrinkin' toasts wid 'em that Larry got throwed. The punch that spalpeen has dhrunk this day would amaze ye. He give us the slip awhiles ago, bad 'cess to him, an' come up here. Didn't I tell ye, Larry, not to be afther ringin' at the owld gintleman's knocker? Ain't ye got no sinse at all?"

"Misther Donnehugh," responded Mr. O'Rourke, with great dignity, "ye 're dhrunk agin."

Mr. Donnehugh, who had not taken more than thirteen ladles of rum-punch, disdained to reply directly.

"He 's a dacent lad enough"—this to Mrs. Bilkins—"but his head is wake. Whin he 's had two sups o' whisky he be-

laves he 's dhrunk a bar'l full. A gill o' wather out of a jimmy-john 'd fuddle him, mum."

"Isn't there anybody to look after him?"

"No, mum, he 's an orphan; his father and mother live in the owld counthry, an' a fine hale owld couple they are."

"Hasn't he any family in the town——"

"Sure, mum, he has a family; wasn't he married this blessed mornin'?"

"He said so."

"Indade, thin, he was—the pore divil!"

"And the—the person?" inquired Mrs. Bilkins.

"Is it the wife, ye mane?"

"Yes, the wife: where is she?"

"Well, thin, mum," said Mr. Donnehugh, "it 's yerself can answer that."

"I?" exclaimed Mrs. Bilkins. "Good heavens! this man 's as crazy as the other!"

"Begorra, if anybody 's crazy, it 's Larry, for it 's Larry has married Margaret."

"What Margaret?" cried Mrs. Bilkins, with a start.

"Margaret Callaghan, sure."

"*Our* Margaret? Do you mean to say that OUR Margaret has married that—that good-for-nothing, inebriated wretch!"

"It's a civil tongue the owld lady has, any way," remarked Mr. O'Rourke critically, from the scraper.

Mrs. Bilkins's voice during the latter part of the colloquy had been pitched in a high key; it rang through the hall and penetrated to the kitchen, where Margaret was thoughtfully wiping the breakfast things. She paused with a half-dried saucer in her hand, and listened. In a moment more she stood, with bloodless face and limp figure, leaning against the banister, behind Mrs. Bilkins.

"Is it there ye are, me jew'l!" cried Mr. O'Rourke, discovering her.

Mrs. Bilkins wheeled upon Margaret.

"Margaret Callaghan, *is* that thing your husband?"

"Ye-yes, mum," faltered Mrs. O'Rourke, with a woful lack of spirit.

"Then take it away!" cried Mrs. Bilkins.

Margaret, with a slight flush on either cheek, glided past Mrs. Bilkins, and the heavy oak door closed with a bang, as the gates of Paradise must have closed of old upon Adam and Eve.

"Come!" said Margaret, taking Mr. O'Rourke by the hand; and the two wan-

dered forth upon their wedding journey down Anchor Street, with all the world before them where to choose. They chose to halt at the small, shabby tenement-house by the river, through the doorway of which the bridal pair disappeared with a reeling, eccentric gait; for Mr. O'Rourke's intoxication seemed to have run down his elbow, and communicated itself to Margaret.

O Hymen! who burnest precious gums and scented woods in thy torch at the melting of aristocratic hearts, with what a pitiful penny-dip thou hast lighted up our little back-street romance!

II.

IT had been no part of Margaret's plan to acknowledge the marriage so soon. Though on pleasure bent, she had a frugal mind. She had invested in a husband with a view of laying him away for a rainy day—that is to say, for such time as her master and mistress should cease to need her services; for she had promised on more than one occasion to remain with the old people as long as they lived. Indeed, if Mr. O'Rourke had come to her and said in so many words, "The day you marry me you must leave the Bilkins family," there is very little doubt but Margaret would have let that young sea-monster slip back unmated, so far as she was concerned, into his native element. The contingency never entered into her calculations. She intended that the ship which had brought Ulysses to her island should take him off again after a decent interval of honeymoon; then she would confess all

to Mrs. Bilkins, and be forgiven, and Mr. Bilkins would not cancel that clause supposed to exist in his will bequeathing two first mortgage bonds of the Squedunk R. R. Co. to a certain faithful servant. In the meanwhile she would add each month to her store in the coffers of the Rivermouth Savings Bank; for Calypso had a neat sum to her credit on the books of that provident institution.

But this could not be now. The volatile bridegroom had upset the wisely conceived plan, and "all the fat was in the fire," as Margaret philosophically put it. Mr. O'Rourke had been fully instructed in the part he was to play, and, to do him justice, had honestly intended to play it; but destiny was against him. It may be observed that destiny and Mr. O'Rourke were not on very friendly terms.

After the ceremony had been performed, and Margaret had stolen back to the Bilkins mansion, as related, Mr. O'Rourke with his own skilful hands had brewed a noble punch for the wedding guests. Standing at the head of the table, and stirring the pungent mixture in a small wash-tub purchased for the occasion, Mr. O'Rourke came out in full

flower. His flow of wit, as he replenished the glasses, was as racy, and seemingly as inexhaustible, as the punch itself. When Mrs. McLaughlin held out her glass, inadvertently upside down, for her sixth ladleful, Mr. O'Rourke gallantly declared it should be filled if he had to stand on his head to do it. The elder Miss O'Leary whispered to Mrs. Connally that Mr. O'Rourke was "a perfic gintleman," and the men in a body pronounced him a bit of the raal shamrock. If Mr. O'Rourke was happy in brewing a punch, he was happier in dispensing it, and happiest of all in drinking a great deal of it himself. He toasted Mrs. Finnigan, the landlady, and the late lamented Finnigan, the father, whom he had never seen, and Miss Biddy Finnigan, the daughter, and a young toddling Finnigan, who was at large in shockingly scant raiment. He drank to the company individually and collectively, drank to the absent, drank to a tin-pedlar who chanced to pass the window, and indeed was in that propitiatory mood when he would have drunk to the health of each separate animal that came out of the Ark. It was in the midst of the confusion and applause which followed his song, "The Wearing of

the Grane," that Mr. O'Rourke, the punch being all gone, withdrew unobserved, and went in quest of Mrs. O'Rourke—with what success the reader knows.

According to the love-idyl of the period, when Laura and Charles Henry, after unheard-of obstacles, are finally united, all cares and tribulations and responsibilities slip from their sleek backs like Christian's burden. The idea is a pretty one, theoretically, but, like some of those models in the Patent Office at Washington, it fails to work. Charles Henry does not go on sitting at Laura's feet and reading Tennyson to her for ever: the rent of the cottage by the sea falls due with prosaic regularity; there are bakers, and butchers, and babies, and tax-collectors, and doctors, and undertakers, and sometimes gentlemen of the jury, to be attended to. Wedded life is not one long amatory poem with recurrent rhymes of love and dove, and kiss and bliss. Yet when the average sentimental novelist has supplied his hero and heroine with their bridal outfit, and arranged that little matter of the marriage certificate, he usually turns off the gas, puts up his shutters, and saunters

off with his hands in his pockets, as if the day's business were over. But we, who are honest dealers in real life, and disdain to give short weight, know better. The business is by no means over; it is just begun. It is not Christian throwing off his pack for good and all, but Christian taking up a load heavier and more difficult than any he has carried.

If Margaret Callaghan, when she meditated matrimony, indulged in any roseate dreams, they were quickly put to flight. She suddenly found herself dispossessed of a quiet, comfortable home, and face to face with the fact that she had a white elephant on her hands. It is not likely that Mr. O'Rourke assumed precisely the shape of a white elephant to her mental vision, but he was as useless and cumbersome and unmanageable as one.

Margaret and Larry's wedding tour did not extend beyond Mrs. Finnigan's establishment, where they took two or three rooms, and set up housekeeping in a humble way. Margaret, who was a tidy housewife, kept the floor of her apartments as white as your hand, the tin plates on the dresser as bright as your lady-love's eyes, and the cook-

ing-stove as neat as the machinery on a Sound steamer. When she was not rubbing the stove with lamp-black she was cooking upon it some savoury dish to tempt the palate of her marine monster. Naturally of a hopeful temperament, she went about her work singing softly to herself at times, and would have been very happy that first week if Mr. O'Rourke had known a sober moment. But Mr. O'Rourke showed an exasperating disposition to keep up festivities. At the end of ten days, however, he toned down, and at Margaret's suggestion that he had better be looking about for some employment he rigged up a fishing-pole, and set out with an injured air for the wharf at the foot of the street, where he fished for the rest of the day. To sit for hours blinking in the sun, waiting for a cunner to come along and take his hook, was as exhaustive a kind of labour as he cared to engage in. Though Mr. O'Rourke had recently returned from a long cruise, he had not a cent to show. During his first three days ashore he had dissipated his three years' pay. The housekeeping expenses began eating a hole in Margaret's little fund, the existence of which was no sooner known to Mr. O'Rourke than

he stood up his fishing-rod in one corner of the room, and thenceforth it caught nothing but cobwebs.

"Divil a sthroke o' work I'll do," said Mr. O'Rourke, "whin we can live at aise on our earnin's. Who 'd be afther frettin' hisself, wid money in the bank? How much is it, Peggy darlint?"

And divil a stroke more of work did he do. He lounged down on the wharves, and, with his short clay pipe stuck between his lips and his hands in his pockets, stared off at the sail-boats on the river. He sat on the door-step of the Finnigan domicile, and plentifully chaffed the passers-by. Now and then, when he could wheedle some fractional currency out of Margaret, he spent it like a crown prince at The Wee Drop around the corner. With that fine magnetism which draws together birds of a feather, he shortly drew about him all the ne'er-do-weels of Rivermouth. It was really wonderful what an unsuspected lot of them there was. From all the frouzy purlieus of the town they crept forth into the sunlight to array themselves under the banner of the prince of scallawags. It was edifying of a summer afternoon to see a dozen of them sitting in a

row, like turtles, on the string-piece of Jedediah Rand's wharf, with their twenty-four feet dangling over the water, assisting Mr. O'Rourke in contemplating the islands in the harbour, and upholding the scenery, as it were.

The rascal had one accomplishment, he had a heavenly voice—quite in the rough, to be sure—and he played on the violin like an angel. He did not know one note from another, but he played in a sweet, natural way, just as Orpheus must have played, by ear. The drunker he was the more pathos and humour he wrung from the old violin, his sole piece of personal property. He had a singular fancy for getting up at two or three o'clock in the morning, and playing by an open casement, to the distraction of all the dogs in the immediate neighbourhood and innumerable dogs in the distance.

Unfortunately, Mr. O'Rourke's freaks were not always of so innocent a complexion. On one or two occasions, through an excess of animal and other spirits, he took to breaking windows in the town. Among his nocturnal feats he accomplished the demolition of the glass in the door of The Wee Drop. Now, breaking windows in Rivermouth is

an amusement not wholly disconnected with an interior view of the police-station (bridewell is the local term) ; so it happened that Mr. O'Rourke woke up one fine morning and found himself snug and tight in one of the cells in the rear of the Brick Market. His plea that the bull's-eye in the glass door of The Wee Drop winked at him in an insultin' manner as he was passing by did not prevent Justice Hackett from fining the delinquent ten dollars and costs, which made sad havoc with the poor wife's bank account. So Margaret's married life wore on, and all went merry as a funeral knell.

After Mrs. Bilkins, with a brow as severe as that of one of the Parcæ, had closed the door upon the O'Rourkes that summer morning, she sat down on the stairs, and, sinking the indignant goddess in the woman, burst into tears. She was still very wroth with Margaret Callaghan, as she persisted in calling her ; very merciless and unforgiving, as the gentler sex are apt to be—to the gentler sex. Mr. Bilkins, however, after the first vexation, missed Margaret from the household ; missed her singing, which was in itself as helpful as a second girl ; missed her hand in the preparation of those hun-

dred and one nameless comforts which are necessities to the old, and wished in his soul that he had her back again. Who could make a gruel, when he was ill, or cook a steak, when he was well, like Margaret? So, meeting her one morning at the fish-market—for Mr. O'Rourke had long since given over the onerous labour of catching cunners—he spoke to her kindly, and asked her how she liked the change in her life, and if Mr. O'Rourke was good to her.

"Troth, thin, sur," said Margaret, with a short, dry laugh, "he 's the divil's own!"

Margaret was thin and careworn, and her laugh had the mild gaiety of champagne not properly corked. These things were apparent even to Mr. Bilkins, who was not a shrewd observer.

"I 'm afraid, Margaret," he remarked sorrowfully, "that you are not making both ends meet."

"Begorra, I 'd be glad if I could make one ind meet!" returned Margaret.

With a duplicity quite foreign to his nature, Mr. Bilkins gradually drew from her the true state of affairs. Mr. O'Rourke was a very bad case indeed; he did nothing towards her support; he was almost con-

stantly drunk; the little money she had laid by was melting away, and would not last until winter. Mr. O'Rourke was perpetually coming home with a sprained ankle, or a bruised shoulder, or a broken head. He had broken most of the furniture in his festive hours, including the cooking-stove. "In short," as Mr. Bilkins said in relating the matter afterwards to Mrs. Bilkins, "he had broken all those things which he shouldn't have broken, and failed to break the one thing he ought to have broken long ago—his neck, namely."

The revelation which startled Mr. Bilkins most was this: in spite of all, Margaret loved Larry with the whole of her warm Irish heart. Further than keeping the poor creature up waiting for him until ever so much o'clock at night, it did not appear that he treated her with personal cruelty. If he had beaten her, perhaps she would have worshipped him. It needed only that.

Revolving Margaret's troubles in his thoughts as he walked homeward, Mr. Bilkins struck upon a plan by which he could help her. When this plan was laid before Mrs. Bilkins, she opposed it with a

vehemence that convinced him she had made up her mind to adopt it.

"Never, never will I have that ungrateful woman under this roof!" cried Mrs. Bilkins; and accordingly the next day Mr. and Mrs. O'Rourke took up their abode in the Bilkins mansion—Margaret as cook, and Larry as gardener.

"I'm convanient if the owld gintleman is," had been Mr. O'Rourke's remark, when the proposition was submitted to him. Not that Mr. O'Rourke had the faintest idea of gardening. He didn't know a tulip from a tomato. He was one of those sanguine people who never hesitate to undertake anything, and are never abashed by their herculean inability.

Mr. Bilkins did not look to Margaret's husband for any great botanical knowledge; but he was rather surprised one day when Mr. O'Rourke pointed to the triangular bed of lilies of the valley, then out of flower, and remarked, "Thim 's a nate lot o' purtaties ye 've got there, sur." Mr. Bilkins, we repeat, did not expect much from Mr. O'Rourke's skill in gardening; his purpose was to reform the fellow if possible, and in any case to make Margaret's lot easier.

Re-established in her old home, Margaret broke into song again, and Mr. O'Rourke himself promised to do very well; morally, we mean, not agriculturally. His ignorance of the simplest laws of nature, if nature has any simple laws, and his dense stupidity on every other subject were heavy trials to Mr. Bilkins. Happily, Mr. Bilkins was not without a sense of humour, else he would have found Mr. O'Rourke insupportable. Just when the old gentleman's patience was about exhausted, the gardener would commit some atrocity so perfectly comical that his master all but loved him for the moment.

"Larry," said Mr. Bilkins, one breathless afternoon in the middle of September, "just see how the thermometer on the back porch stands."

Mr. O'Rourke disappeared, and after a prolonged absence returned with the monstrous announcement that the thermometer stood at 820!

Mr. Bilkins looked at the man closely. He was unmistakably sober.

"Eight hundred and twenty what?" cried Mr. Bilkins, feeling very warm, as he naturally would in so high a temperature.

"Eight hundthred an' twinty degrays, I suppose, sur."

"Larry, you 're an idiot."

This was obviously not to Mr. O'Rourke's taste; for he went out and brought the thermometer, and, pointing triumphantly to the line of numerals running parallel with the glass tube, exclaimed, "Add 'em up yerself, thin!"

Perhaps this would not have been amusing if Mr. Bilkins had not spent the greater part of the previous forenoon in initiating Mr. O'Rourke into the mysteries of the thermometer. Nothing could make amusing Mr. O'Rourke's method of setting out crocus bulbs. Mr. Bilkins had received a lot of a very choice variety from Boston, and having a headache that morning, turned over to Mr. O'Rourke the duty of planting them. Though he had never seen a bulb in his life, Larry unblushingly asserted that he had set out thousands for Sir Lucius O'Grady of O'Grady Castle, "an illegant place intirely, wid tin miles o' garden walks," added Mr. O'Rourke, crushing Mr. Bilkins, who boasted only of a few humble flower-beds.

The following day he stepped into the garden to see how Larry had done his work.

There stood the parched bulbs, carefully arranged in circles and squares on the top of the soil.

"Didn't I tell you to set out these bulbs?" cried Mr. Bilkins wrathfully.

"An' didn't I set 'em out?" expostulated Mr. O'Rourke. "An' ain't they a settin' there beautiful"

"But you should have put them into the ground, stupid!"

"Is it bury 'em ye mane? Be jabbers! how could they iver git out agin? Give the little jokers a fair show, Misther Bilkins"

For two weeks Mr. O'Rourke conducted himself with comparative propriety; that is to say, he rendered himself useless about the place, appeared regularly at his meals, and kept sober. Perhaps the hilarious strains of music which sometimes issued at midnight from the upper window of the north gable were not just what a quiet, unostentatious family would desire; but on the whole there was not much to complain of.

The third week witnessed a falling off. Though always promptly on hand at the serving out of rations, Mr. O'Rourke did not even make a pretence of working in the gar-

den. He would disappear mysteriously immediately after breakfast, and reappear with supernatural abruptness at dinner. Nobody knew what he did with himself in the interval, until one day he was observed to fall out of an apple-tree near the stable. His retreat discovered, he took to the wharves and the alleys in the distant part of the town. It soon became evident that his ways were not the ways of temperance, and that all his paths led to The Wee Drop.

Of course Margaret tried to keep this from the family. Being a woman, she coined excuses for him in her heart. It was a dull life for the lad, any way, and it was worse than him that was leading Larry astray. Hours and hours after the old people had gone to bed, she would sit without a light in the lonely kitchen, listening for that shuffling step along the gravel walk. Night after night she never closed her eyes, and went about the house the next day with that smooth, impenetrable face behind which women hide their care.

One morning found Margaret sitting pale and anxious by the kitchen stove. O'Rourke had not come home at all. Noon came, and

night, but not Larry. Whenever Mrs. Bilkins approached her that day, Margaret was humming "Kate Kearney" quite merrily. But when her work was done, she stole out at the back gate and went in search of him. She scoured the neighbourhood like a madwoman. O'Rourke had not been at the Finnigans'. He had not been at The Wee Drop since Monday, and this was Wednesday night. Her heart sunk within her when she failed to find him in the police-station. Some dreadful thing had happened to him. She came back to the house with one hand pressed wearily against her cheek. The dawn struggled through the kitchen windows, and fell upon Margaret crouched by the stove.

She could no longer wear her mask. When Mr. Bilkins came down she confessed that Larry had taken to drinking again, and had not been home for two nights.

"Mayhap he 's drownded hisself," suggested Margaret, wringing her hands.

"Not he," said Mr. Bilkins; "he doesn't like the taste of water well enough."

"Troth, thin, he doesn't," reflected Margaret, and the reflection comforted her.

"At any rate I 'll go and look him up

after breakfast," said Mr. Bilkins. And after breakfast, accordingly, Mr. Bilkins sallied forth with the depressing expectation of finding Mr. O'Rourke without much difficulty. "Come to think of it," said the old gentleman to himself, drawing on his white cotton gloves as he walked up Anchor Street, "*I* don't want to find him."

III.

BUT Mr. O'Rourke was not to be found. With amiable cynicism Mr. Bilkins directed his steps in the first instance to the police-station, quite confident that a bird of Mr. O'Rourke's plumage would be brought to perch in such a cage. But not so much as a feather of him was discoverable. The Wee Drop was not the only bacchanalian resort in Rivermouth; there were five or six other low drinking-shops scattered about town, and through these Mr. Bilkins went conscientiously. He then explored various blind alleys, known haunts of the missing man, and took a careful survey of the wharves along the river on his way home. He even shook the apple-tree near the stable with a vague hope of bringing down Mr. O'Rourke, but brought down nothing except a few winter apples, which, being both unripe and unsound, were not perhaps bad representatives of the object of his search.

That evening a small boy stopped at the door of the Bilkins mansion with a straw hat, at once identified as Mr. O'Rourke's, which had been found on Neal's Wharf. This would have told against another man; but O'Rourke was always leaving his hat on a wharf. Margaret's distress is not to be pictured. She fell back upon and clung to the idea that Larry had drowned himself, not intentionally, may be; possibly he had fallen overboard while intoxicated.

The late Mr. Buckle has informed us that death by drowning is regulated by laws as inviolable and beautiful as those of the solar system; that a certain percentage of the earth's population is bound to drown itself annually, whether it wants to or not. It may be presumed, then, that Rivermouth's proper quota of dead bodies was washed ashore during the ensuing two months. There had been gales off the coast and pleasure parties on the river, and between them they had managed to do a ghastly business. But Mr. O'Rourke failed to appear among the flotsam and jetsam which the receding tides left tangled in the piles of the Rivermouth wharves. This convinced Margaret that Larry had proved a too tempting morsel

to some buccaneering shark, or had fallen a victim to one of those immense schools of fish which seem to have a yearly appointment with the fishermen on this coast. From that day Margaret never saw a cod or a mackerel brought into the house without an involuntary shudder. She averted her head in making up the fish-balls, as if she half dreaded to detect a faint aroma of whisky about them. And, indeed, why might not a man fall into the sea, be eaten, say, by a halibut, and reappear on the scene of his earthly triumphs and defeats in the non-committal form of hashed fish?

"Imperial Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away."

But, perhaps, as the conservative Horatio suggests, 'twere to consider too curiously to consider so.

Mr. Bilkins had come to adopt Margaret's explanation of O'Rourke's disappearance. He was undoubtedly drowned; had most likely drowned himself. The hat picked up on the wharf was strong circumstantial evidence in that direction. But one feature of the case staggered Mr. Bilkins. O'Rourke's violin had also disappeared. Now, it re-

quired no great effort to imagine a man throwing himself overboard under the influence of *mania à potu ;* but it was difficult to conceive of a man committing violinicide ! If the fellow went to drown himself, why did he take his fiddle with him ? He might as well have taken an umbrella or a German student-lamp. This question troubled Mr. Bilkins a good deal first and last. But one thing was indisputable : the man was gone—and had evidently gone by water.

It was now that Margaret invested her husband with charms of mind and person not calculated to make him recognisable by any one who had ever had the privilege of knowing him in the faulty flesh. She eliminated all his bad qualities, and projected from her imagination a Mr. O'Rourke as he ought to have been—a species of seraphic being mixed up in some way with a violin ; and to this ideal she erected a costly headstone in the suburban cemetery. "It would be a proud day for Larry," observed Margaret contemplatively, "if he could rest his oi on the illegant monumint I 've put up to him." If Mr. O'Rourke could have read the inscription on it, he would never have suspected his own complicity in the matter.

But there the marble stood, sacred to his memory; and soon the snow came down from the grey sky and covered it, and the invisible snow of weeks and months drifted down on Margaret's heart, and filled up its fissures, and smoothed off the sharp angles of its grief; and there was peace upon it.

Not but she sorrowed for Larry at times. Yet life had a relish to it again; she was free, though she did not look at it in that light; she was happier in a quiet fashion than she had ever been, though she would not have acknowledged it to herself. She wondered that she had the heart to laugh when the ice-man made love to her. Perhaps she was conscious of something comically incongruous in the warmth of a gentleman who spent all winter in cutting ice, and all summer in dealing it out to his customers. She had not the same excuse for laughing at the baker; yet she laughed still more merrily at him when he pressed her hand over the steaming loaf of brown bread, delivered every Saturday morning at the scullery door. Both these gentlemen had known Margaret many years, yet neither of them had valued her very highly until another man came along and married her. A widow, it would

appear, is esteemed in some sort as a warranted article, being stamped with the maker's name.

There was even a third lover in prospect; for according to the gossip of the town, Mr. Donnehugh was frequently to be seen of a Sunday afternoon standing in the cemetery and regarding Mr. O'Rourke's headstone with unrestrained satisfaction.

A year had passed away, and certain bits of colour blossoming among Margaret's weeds indicated that the winter of her mourning was over. The ice-man and the baker were hating each other cordially, and Mrs. Bilkins was daily expecting it would be discovered before night that Margaret had married one or both of them. But to do Margaret justice, she was faithful in thought and deed to the memory of O'Rourke—not the O'Rourke who disappeared so strangely, but the O'Rourke who never existed.

"D'ye think, mum," she said one day to Mrs. Bilkins, as that lady was adroitly sounding her on the ice question—"d' ye think I'd condescind to take up wid the likes o' him, or the baker either, afther sich a man as Larry?"

The rectified and clarified O'Rourke was

a permanent wonder to Mr. Bilkins, who bore up under the bereavement with noticeable resignation.

"Peggy is right," said the old gentleman, who was superintending the burning out of the kitchen flue. "She won't find another man like Larry O'Rourke in a hurry."

"Thrue for ye, Mr. Bilkins," answered Margaret. "May be there 's as good fish in the say as ever was caught, but I don't belave it, all the same."

As good fish in the sea! The words recalled to Margaret the nature of her loss, and she went on with her work in silence.

"What—what is it, Ezra?" cried Mrs. Bilkins, changing colour, and rising hastily from the breakfast table. Her first thought was of apoplexy.

There sat Mr. Bilkins, with his wig pushed back from his forehead, and his eyes fixed vacantly on *The Weekly Chronicle*, which he held out at arm's-length before him.

"Good heavens, Ezra! what is the matter?"

Mr. Bilkins turned his eyes upon her mechanically, as if he were a great wax doll and somebody had pulled his wire.

"Can't you speak, Ezra?"

His lips opened, and moved inarticulately; then he pointed a rigid finger, in the manner of a guide-board, at a paragraph in the paper, which he held up for Mrs. Bilkins to read over his shoulder. When she had read it she sunk back into her chair without a word, and the two sat contemplating each other as if they had never met before in this world, and were not overpleased at meeting.

The paragraph which produced this singular effect on the aged couple occurred at the end of a column of telegraphic despatches giving the details of an unimportant engagement that had just taken place between one of the blockading squadron and a Confederate cruiser. The engagement itself does not concern us, but this item from the list of casualties on the Union side has a direct bearing on our narrative :—

"Larry O'Rourke, seaman, splinter wound in the leg. Not serious."

That splinter flew far. It glanced from Mr. O'Rourke's leg, went plumb through the Bilkins mansion, and knocked over a small marble slab in the Old South Burying Ground.

If a ghost had dropped in familiarly to breakfast, the constraint and consternation of the Bilkins family could not have been greater. How was the astounding intelligence to be broken to Margaret? Her explosive Irish nature made the task one of extreme delicacy. Mrs. Bilkins flatly declared herself incapable of undertaking it. Mr. Bilkins, with many misgivings as to his fitness, assumed the duty; for it would never do to have the news sprung suddenly upon Margaret by people outside.

As Mrs. O'Rourke was clearing away the breakfast things, Mr. Bilkins, who had lingered near the window with the newspaper in his hand, coughed once or twice in an unnatural way to show that he was not embarrassed, and began to think that may be it would be best to tell Margaret after dinner. Mrs. Bilkins fathomed his thought with that intuition which renders women terrible, and sent across the room an eye-telegraph to this effect, "Now is your time."

"There 's been another battle down South, Margaret," said the old gentleman presently, folding up the paper and putting it in his pocket. "A sea-fight this time."

"Sure, an' they 're allus fightin' down there."

"But not always with so little damage. There was only one man wounded on our side."

"Pore man! It 's sorry we oughter be for his wife an' childer, if he 's got any."

"Not badly wounded, you will understand, Margaret—not at all seriously wounded; only a splinter in the leg."

"Faith, thin, a splinter in the leg is no pleasant thing in itself."

"A mere scratch," said Mr. Bilkins lightly, as if he were constantly in the habit of going about with a splinter in his own leg, and found it rather agreeable. "The odd part of the matter is the man's first name. His first name was Larry."

Margaret nodded, as one should say, There 's a many Larrys in the world.

"But the oddest part of it," continued Mr. Bilkins, in a carelessly sepulchral voice, "is the man's last name."

Something in the tone of his voice made Margaret look at him, and something in the expression of his face caused the blood to fly from Margaret's cheek.

"The man's last name!" she repeated wonderingly.

"Yes, his last name—O'Rourke."

"D'ye mane it?" shrieked Margaret—"d'ye mane it? Glory to God! O worra! worra!"

"Well, Ezra," said Mrs. Bilkins, in one of those spasms of base ingratitude to which even the most perfect women are liable, "you 've made nice work of it. You might as well have knocked her down with an axe!"

"But, my dear——"

"Oh, bother!—my smelling-bottle, quick!—second bureau drawer—left-hand side."

Joy never kills; it is a celestial kind of hydrogen of which it seems impossible to get too much at one inhalation. In an hour Margaret was able to converse with comparative calmness on the resuscitation of Larry O'Rourke, whom the firing of a cannon had brought to the surface, as if he had been in reality a drowned body.

Now that the whole town was aware of Mr. O'Rourke's fate, his friend Mr. Donnehugh came forward with a statement that would have been of some interest at an earlier period, but was of no service as matters stood, except so far as it assisted in removing from Mr. Bilkins's mind a passing doubt

as to whether the Larry O'Rourke of the telegraphic reports was Margaret's scapegrace of a husband. Mr. Donnehugh had known all along that O'Rourke had absconded to Boston by a night train and enlisted in the navy. It was the possession of this knowledge that had made it impossible for Mr. Donnehugh to look at Mr. O'Rourke's gravestone without grinning.

At Margaret's request, and in Margaret's name, Mr. Bilkins wrote three or four letters to O'Rourke, and finally succeeded in extorting an epistle from that gentleman, in which he told Margaret to cheer up, that his fortune was as good as made, and that the day would come when she should ride through the town in her own coach, and no thanks to old flint-head, who pretended to be so fond of her. Mr. Bilkins tried to conjecture who was meant by old flint-head, but was obliged to give it up. Mr. O'Rourke furthermore informed Margaret that he had three hundred dollars prize-money coming to him, and broadly intimated that when he got home he intended to have one of the most extensive blow-outs ever witnessed in Rivermouth.

"Och!" laughed Margaret, "that's jist

Larry over agin. The pore lad was allus full of his nonsense an' spirits."

"That he was," said Mr. Bilkins dryly.

Content with the fact that her husband was in the land of the living, Margaret gave herself no trouble over the separation. O'Rourke had shipped for three years; one-third of his term of service was past, and two years more, God willing, would see him home again. This was Margaret's view of it. Mr. Bilkins's view of it was not so cheerful. The prospect of Mr. O'Rourke's ultimate return was anything but enchanting. Mr. Bilkins was by no means disposed to kill the fatted calf. He would much rather have killed the Prodigal Son. However, there was always this chance: he might never come back.

The tides rose and fell at the Rivermouth wharves; the summer moonlight and the winter snow, in turn, bleached its quiet streets; and the two years had nearly gone by. In the meantime nothing had been heard of O'Rourke. If he ever received the five or six letters sent to him, he did not fatigue himself by answering them.

"Larry 's all right," said hopeful Margaret. "If any harum had come to the gos-

soon, we'd have knowed it. It's the bad news that travels fast."

Mr. Bilkins was not so positive about that. It had taken a whole year to find out that O'Rourke had not drowned himself.

The period of Mr. O'Rourke's enlistment had come to an end. Two months slipped by, and he had neglected to brighten Rivermouth with his presence. There were many things that might have detained him, difficulties in getting his prize-papers or in drawing his pay; but there was no reason why he might not have written. The days were beginning to grow long to Margaret, and vague forebodings of misfortune possessed her.

Perhaps we had better look up Mr. O'Rourke.

He had seen some rough times during those three years, and some harder work than catching cunners at the foot of Anchor Street, or setting out crocuses in Mr. Bilkins's back garden. He had seen battles and shipwreck, and death in many guises; but they had taught him nothing, as the sequel will show. With his active career in the navy we shall not trouble ourselves;

we take him up at a date a little prior to the close of his term of service.

Several months before, he had been transferred from the blockading squadron to a gunboat attached to the fleet operating against the forts defending New Orleans. The forts had fallen, the fleet had passed on to the city, and Mr. O'Rourke's ship lay off in the stream, binding up her wounds. In three days he would receive his discharge, and the papers entitling him to a handsome amount of prize-money in addition to his pay. With noble contempt for so much good fortune, Mr. O'Rourke dropped over the bows of the gunboat one evening and managed to reach the levee. In the city he fell in with some soldiers, and, being of a convivial nature, caroused with them that night, and next day enlisted in a cavalry regiment.

Desertion in the face of the enemy—for, though the city lay under Federal guns, it was still hostile enough—involved the heaviest penalties. O'Rourke was speedily arrested with other deserters, tried by court-martial, and sentenced to death.

The intelligence burst like a shell upon the quiet household in Anchor Street, listening daily for the sound of Larry O'Rourke's

footstep on the threshold. It was a heavy load for Margaret to bear, after all those years of patient vigil. But the load was to be lightened for her. In consideration of O'Rourke's long service, and in view of the fact that his desertion so near the expiration of his time was an absurdity, the good President commuted his sentence to imprisonment for life, with loss of prize-money and back pay. Mr. O'Rourke was despatched North, and placed in Moyamensing Prison.

If joy could kill, Margaret would have been a dead woman the day these tidings reached Rivermouth; and Mr. Bilkins himself would have been in a critical condition, for, though he did not want O'Rourke shot or hanged, he was delighted to have him permanently shelved.

After the excitement was over, and this is always the trying time, Margaret accepted the situation philosophically.

"The pore lad 's out o' harum's rache, any way," she reflected. "He can't be gittin' into hot wather now, and that 's a fact. And may be after awhiles they 'll let him go agin. They let out murtherers and thaves and sich like, and Larry 's done no hurt to nobody but hisself."

Margaret was inclined to be rather severe on President Lincoln for taking away Larry's prize-money. The impression was strong on her mind that the money went into Mr. Lincoln's private exchequer.

"I wouldn't wonder if Misthress Lincoln had a new silk gownd or two this fall," Margaret would remark sarcastically.

The prison rules permitted Mr. O'Rourke to receive periodical communications from his friends outside. Once every quarter Mr. Bilkins wrote him a letter, and in the interim Margaret kept him supplied with those doleful popular ballads, printed on broadsides, which one sees pinned up for sale on the iron railings of city churchyards, and seldom anywhere else. They seem the natural exhalations of the mould and pathos of such places, but we have a suspicion that they are written by sentimental young undertakers. Though these songs must have been a solace to Mr. O'Rourke in his captivity, he never so far forgot himself as to acknowledge their receipt. It was only through the kindly chaplain of the prison that Margaret was now and then advised of the well-being of her husband.

Towards the close of that year the great

O'Rourke himself did condescend to write one letter. As this letter has never been printed, and as it is the only specimen extant of Mr. O'Rourke's epistolary manner, we lay it before the reader *verbatim et literatim* :—

febuary. 1864

mi belovid wife

fur the luv of God sind mee pop gose the wezel. yours till deth

larry O rourke.

"Pop goes the Weasel" was sent to him, and Mr. Bilkins ingeniously slipped into the same envelope "The Drunkard's Death" and "Beware of the Bowl," two spirited compositions well calculated to exert a salutary influence over a man imprisoned for life.

There is nothing in this earthly existence so uncertain as what seems to be a certainty. To all appearances, the world outside of Moyamensing Prison was for ever a closed book to O'Rourke. But the Southern Confederacy collapsed, the General Amnesty Proclamation was issued, cell doors were thrown open ; and one afternoon Mr. Larry O'Rourke, with his head neatly shaved, walked into the Bilkins kitchen and frightened Margaret nearly out of her skin.

Mr. O'Rourke's summing up of his case was characteristic: "I've been kilt in battle, hanged by the court-martial, put into the lock-up for life, and here I am, bedad, not a ha'p'orth the worse for it."

None the worse for it certainly, and none the better. By no stretch of magical fiction can we make an angel of him. He is not at all the material for an apotheosis. It was not for him to reform and settle down, and become a respectable, oppressed tax-payer. His conduct in Rivermouth, after his return, was a repetition of his old ways. Margaret all but broke down under the tests to which he put her affections, and came at last to wish that Larry had never got out of Moyamensing Prison.

If any change had taken place in Mr. O'Rourke, it showed itself in occasional fits of sullenness towards Margaret. It was in one of these moods that he slouched his hat over his brows, and told her she need not wait dinner for him.

It will be a cold dinner, if Margaret has kept it waiting; for two years have gone by since that day, and O'Rourke has not come home.

Possibly he is off on a whaling voyage;

possibly the swift maelstrom has dragged him down ; perhaps he is lifting his hand to knock at the door of the Bilkins mansion as we pen these words. But Margaret does not watch for him impatiently any more. There are strands of grey in her black hair. She has had her romance.

THE LITTLE VIOLINIST.

THE LITTLE VIOLINIST.

Weep with me, all you that read
This little story;
And know, for whom a tear you shed,
Death's self is sorry.

BEN JONSON.

THIS story is no invention of mine. I could not invent anything half so lovely and pathetic as seems to me the incident which has come ready-made to my hand.

Some of you, doubtless, have heard of James Speaight, the infant violinist, or Young Americus, as he was called. He was born in London, I believe, and was only four years old when his father brought him to this country, less than three years ago. Since that time he has appeared in concerts and various entertainments in many of our principal cities, attracting unusual attention by his musical skill. I confess, however, that I had not heard of him until last month, though it seems he had previously given two

or three public performances in the city where I live. I had not heard of him, I say, until last month ; but since then I do not think a day has passed when this child's face has not risen up in my memory—the little half-sad face, as I saw it once, with its large, serious eyes and infantile mouth.

I have, I trust, great tenderness for all children ; but I know that I have a special place in my heart for those poor little creatures who figure in circuses and shows, or elsewhere, as "infant prodigies." Heaven help such little folk ! It was an unkind fate that did not make them commonplace, stupid, happy girls and boys like our own Fannys and Charleys and Harrys. Poor little waifs, that never know any babyhood or childhood—sad human midges, that flutter for a moment in the glare of the gaslights, and are gone. Pitiful little children, whose tender limbs and minds are so torn and strained by thoughtless taskmasters, that it seems scarcely a regrettable thing when the circus caravan halts a while on its route to make a small grave by the wayside.

I never witness a performance of child-acrobats, or the exhibition of any forced talent, physical or mental, on the part of

children, without protesting, at least in my own mind, against the blindness and cruelty of their parents or guardians, or whoever has care of them.

I saw at the theatre, the other night, two tiny girls—mere babies they were—doing such feats upon a bar of wood suspended from the ceiling as made my blood run cold. They were twin sisters, these mites, with that old young look on their faces which all such unfortunates have. I hardly dared glance at them, up there in the air, hanging by their feet from the swinging bar, twisting their fragile spines and distorting their poor little bodies, when they ought to have been nestled in soft blankets in a cosy chamber, with the angels that guard the sleep of little children hovering above them. I hope that the father of those two babies will read and ponder this page, on which I record not alone my individual protest, but the protest of hundreds of men and women who took no pleasure in that performance, but witnessed it with a pang of pity.

There is a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Dumb Animals. There ought to be a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty

to Little Children ; and a certain influential gentleman, who does some things well and other things very badly, ought to attend to it. The name of this gentleman is Public Opinion.[1]

But to my story.

One September morning, about five years and a half ago, there wandered to my fireside, hand in hand, two small personages who requested in a foreign language, which I understood at once, to be taken in and fed and clothed and sent to school and loved and tenderly cared for. Very modest of them—was it not ?—in view of the fact that I had never seen either of them before. To all intents and purposes they were perfect strangers to *me*. What was my surprise when it turned out (just as if it were in a fairy legend) that these were my own sons ! When I say they came hand in hand, it is to advise you that these two boys were twins, like that pair of tiny girls I just mentioned.

[1] This sketch was written in 1874. The author claims for it no other merit than that of having been among the earliest appeals for the formation of such a Society as now exists—the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

These young gentlemen are at present known as Charley and Talbot, in the household, and to a very limited circle of acquaintances outside; but as Charley has declared his intention to become a circus-rider, and Talbot, who has not so soaring an ambition, has resolved to be a policeman, it is likely the world will hear of them before long. In the meantime, and with a view to the severe duties of the professions selected, they are learning the alphabet, Charley vaulting over the hard letters with an agility which promises well for his career as circus-rider, and Talbot collaring the slippery S's and pursuing the suspicious X Y Z's with the promptness and boldness of a night-watchman.

Now it is my pleasure not only to feed and clothe Masters Charley and Talbot as if they were young princes or dukes, but to look to it that they do not wear out their ingenious minds by too much study. So I occasionally take them to a puppet-show or a musical entertainment, and always in holiday-time to see a pantomime. This last is their especial delight. It is a fine thing to behold the business-like air with which they climb into their seats in the parquet, and

the gravity with which they immediately begin to read the play-bill upside down. Then, between the acts, the solemnity with which they extract the juice from an orange, through a hole made with a lead-pencil, is also a noticeable thing.

Their knowledge of the mysteries of Fairyland is at once varied and profound. Everything delights, but nothing astonishes them. That people covered with spangles should dive headlong through the floor ; that fairy queens should step out of the trunks of trees ; that the poor woodcutter's cottage should change, in the twinkling of an eye, into a glorious palace or a goblin grotto under the sea, with crimson fountains and golden staircases and silver foliage — all that is a matter of course. This is the kind of world they live in at present. If these things happened at home they would not be astonished.

The other day, it was just before Christmas, I saw the boys attentively regarding a large pumpkin which lay on the kitchen floor, waiting to be made into pies. If that pumpkin had suddenly opened, if wheels had sprouted out on each side, and if the two kittens playing with an onion-skin by

the range had turned into milk-white ponies and harnessed themselves to this Cinderella coach, neither Charley nor Talbot would have considered it an unusual circumstance.

The pantomime which is usually played at the Boston Theatre during the holidays is to them positive proof that the stories of Cinderella and Jack of the Beanstalk and Jack the Giant-Killer have historical solidity. They like to be reassured on that point. So one morning last January, when I informed Charley and Talbot, at the breakfast-table, that Prince Rupert and his court had come to town,

"Some in jags,
Some in rags,
And some in velvet gown,"

the news was received with great satisfaction; for this meant that we were to go to the play.

For the sake of the small folk, who could not visit him at night, Prince Rupert was gracious enough to appear every Saturday afternoon during the month. We decided to wait upon his Highness at one of his *matinées*.

You would never have dreamed that the sun was shining brightly outside, if you had

been with us in the theatre that afternoon. All the window-shutters were closed, and the great glass chandelier hanging from the gaily painted dome was one blaze of light. But brighter even than the jets of gas were the ruddy, eager faces of countless boys and girls, fringing the balconies and crowded into the seats below, longing for the play to begin. And nowhere were there two merrier or more eager faces than those of Charley and Talbot, pecking now and then at a brown paper cone filled with white grapes, which I held, and waiting for the solemn green curtain to roll up and disclose the coral realm of the Naiad Queen.

I shall touch very lightly on the literary aspects of the play. Its plot, like that of the modern novel, was of so subtle a nature as not to be visible to the naked eye. I doubt if the dramatist himself could have explained it, even if he had been so condescending as to attempt to do so. There was a bold young prince—Prince Rupert, of course—who went into Wonderland in search of adventures. He reached Wonderland by leaping from the castle of Drachenfels into the Rhine. Then there was one Snaps, the prince's valet, who did not in the

least want to go, but went, and got terribly frightened by the Green Demons of the Chrysolite Cavern, which made us all laugh —it being such a pleasant thing to see somebody else scared nearly to death. Then there were knights in brave tin armour, and armies of fair pre-Raphaelite amazons, in all the colours of the rainbow, and troops of unhappy slave-girls, who did nothing but smile and wear beautiful dresses, and dance continually to the most delightful music. Now you were in an enchanted castle on the banks of the Rhine, and now you were in a cave of amethysts and diamonds at the bottom of the river—scene following scene with such bewildering rapidity, that finally you did not quite know where you were.

But what interested me most, and what pleased Charley and Talbot even beyond the Naiad Queen herself, was the little violinist who came to the German Court, and played before Prince Rupert and his bride.

It was such a little fellow! He was not more than a year older than my own boys, and not much taller. He had a very sweet, sensitive face, with large grey eyes, in which there was a deep-settled expression that I do not like to see in a child. Looking at his

eyes alone, you would have said he was sixteen or seventeen, and he was merely a baby!

I do not know enough of music to assert that he had wonderful genius, or any genius at all; but it seemed to me he played charmingly, and with the touch of a natural musician.

At the end of his piece he was lifted over the foot-lights of the stage into the orchestra, where, with the conductor's *bâton* in his hand, he directed the band in playing one or two difficult compositions. In this he evinced a carefully trained ear and a perfect understanding of the music.

I wanted to hear the little violin again; but as he made his bow to the audience and ran off, it was with a half-wearied air, and I did not join with my neighbours in calling him back. "There 's another performance to-night," I reflected, "and the little fellow isn't very strong." He came out, however, and bowed, but did not play again.

All the way home from the theatre my children were full of the little violinist, and as they went along, chattering and frolicking in front of me, and getting under my feet like a couple of young spaniels (they

did not look unlike two small brown spaniels, with their fur-trimmed overcoats and sealskin caps and ear lappets), I could not help thinking how different the poor little musician's lot was from theirs.

He was only six years and a half old, and had been before the public nearly three years. What hours of toil and weariness he must have been passing through at the very time when my little ones were being rocked and petted and shielded from every ungentle wind that blows! And what an existence was his now—travelling from city to city, practising at every spare moment, and performing night after night in some close theatre or concert-room when he should be drinking in that deep, refreshing slumber which childhood needs! However much he was loved by those who had charge of him, and they must have treated him kindly, it was a hard life for the child.

He ought to have been turned out into the sunshine; that pretty violin—one can easily understand that he was fond of it himself—ought to have been taken away from him, and a kite-string placed in his hand instead. If God had set the germ of a great musician or a great composer in that

slight body, surely it would have been wise to let the precious gift ripen and flower in its own good season.

This is what I thought, walking home in the amber glow of the wintry sunset; but my boys saw only the bright side of the tapestry, and would have liked nothing better than to change places with little James Speaight. To stand in the midst of Fairy-land, and play beautiful tunes on a toy fiddle, while all the people clapped their hands—what could quite equal that? Charley began to think it was no such grand thing to be a circus-rider, and the dazzling career of policeman had lost something of its glamour in the eyes of Talbot.

It is my custom every night, after the children are snug in their nests and the gas is turned down, to sit on the side of the bed and chat with them five or ten minutes. If anything has gone wrong through the day, it is never alluded to at this time. None but the most agreeable topics are discussed. I make it a point that the boys shall go to sleep with untroubled hearts. When our chat is ended, they say their prayers. Now, among the pleas which they offer up for the several members of the family, they fre-

quently intrude the claims of rather curious objects for Divine compassion. Sometimes it is the rocking-horse that has broken a leg, sometimes it is Shem or Japhet who has lost an arm in disembarking from Noah's ark; Pinky and Inky, the kittens, and Rob, the dog, are never forgotten.

So it did not surprise me at all this Saturday night when both boys prayed God to watch over and bless the little violinist.

The next morning at the breakfast-table, when I unfolded the newspaper, the first paragraph my eyes fell upon was this :—

"James Speaight, the infant violinist, died in this city late on Saturday night. At the *matinée* of the 'Naiad Queen,' on the afternoon of that day, when little James Speaight came off the stage, after giving his usual violin performance, Mr. Shewell[1] noticed that he appeared fatigued, and asked if he felt ill. He replied that he had a pain in his heart, and then Mr. Shewell suggested that he remain away from the evening performance. He retired quite early, and about midnight his father heard him say, '*Gracious God, make room for another little child in Heaven.*' No sound was heard after this,

[1] The stage-manager.

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